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SELECTION

FROM THE

FIRST FOUR VOLUMES

OF

PAROCHIAL SERMONS

BY

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VICAR OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN'S, OXFORD,

AND FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. G. F. & J. RIVINGTON,

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, AND WATERLOO PLACE, PALL MALL;

& J. H. PARKER, OXFORD.

1841.

250
New/Sel
110727

LONDON:
GILBERT & RIVINGTON, PRINTERS,
ST. JOHN'S SQUARE.

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SERMON I.

GOD'S COMMANDMENTS NOT GRIEVOUS.

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"This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous."

It must ever be borne in mind that it is a very great and arduous thing to attain to heaven. "Many are called, few are chosen." "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way." "Many will seek to enter in and shall not be able." "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple[1]." On the other hand, it is evident to any one, who reads the New Testament with attention, that Christ and His Apostles speak of a religious life as something easy, pleasant, and comfortable. Thus, in the words I have taken for my text:—"This is the love of God, that we

[1] Matt. xxii. 14; vii. 14. Luke xiii. 24; xiv. 26.

keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous." In like manner our Saviour says, "Come unto Me . . . . and I will give you rest . . . . My yoke is easy and My burden is light[2]." Solomon also, in the Old Testament, speaks in the same way of true wisdom:—"Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her . . . . When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet[3]." Again, we read in the prophet Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God[4]?" as if it were a little and an easy thing so to do.

Now I will attempt to show *how* it is that these apparently opposite declarations of Christ and His Prophets and Apostles are fulfilled to us. For it may be objected by inconsiderate persons that we are (if I may so express it) *hardly treated;* invited to come to Christ and receive His light yoke, promised an easy and happy life, the joy of a good conscience, the assurance of pardon, and the hope of heaven; and then, on the other hand, when we actually come, as it were, rudely

[2] Matt. xi. 28—30. [3] Prov. iii. 17—24. [4] Micah vi. 8.

repulsed, frightened, reduced to despair by severe requisitions and evil forebodings. Such is the objection,—not which any *Christian* would bring forward; for we, my brethren, know too much of the love of our Master and only Saviour in dying for us, seriously to entertain for an instant any such complaint. We have at least faith enough for this, (and it does not require a great deal,) viz. to believe that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, is not "yea and nay, but in Him is yea. For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God by us[5]." It is for the very reason that none of us can seriously put the objection, that I allow myself to state it strongly; to urge it being in a Christian's judgment absurd, even more than it would be wicked. But though none of *us* really feel as an objection to the Gospel, this difference of view under which it is presented to us, or even as a difficulty, still it may be right (in order to our edification) that we should see how these two views of it are reconciled. We must understand *how* it is *both* severe *and* indulgent in its commands, and both arduous and easy in its obedience, in order that we may understand it at all.

"His commandments are not grievous," says

[5] 2 Cor. i. 19, 20.

the text. How is this?—I will give one answer out of several which might be given.

Now it must be admitted, first of all, as matter of fact, that they *are* grievous to the great mass of Christians. I have no wish to disguise a fact which we do not need the Bible to inform us of, but which common experience attests. Doubtless even those common elementary duties, of which the prophet speaks, "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God," are to most men *grievous*.

Accordingly, men of worldly minds, finding the true way of life unpleasant to walk in, have attempted to find out other and easier roads; and have been accustomed to argue, that there must be another way which suits them better than that which religious men walk in, for the very reason that Scripture declares that Christ's commandments are *not* grievous. I mean, you will meet with persons who say, "After all it is not to be supposed that a strict religious life is so necessary as is told us in church; else how should any one be saved? nay, and Christ assures us His yoke is easy. Doubtless we shall fare well enough, though we are not so earnest in the observance of our duties as we might be; though we are not regular in our attendance at public worship; though we do not honour Christ's ministers and

reverence His Church as much as some men do; though we do not labour to know God's will, to deny ourselves, and to live to His glory, as entirely as the strict letter of Scripture enjoins." Some men have gone so far as boldly to say, "God will not condemn a man merely for taking a little pleasure;" by which they mean, leading an irreligious and profligate life. And many there are who virtually maintain that we may live to the world, so that we do so decently, and yet live to God; arguing that this world's blessings are given us by God, and therefore may lawfully be used; —that to use lawfully is to use moderately and thankfully;—that it is wrong to take gloomy views, and right to be innocently cheerful, and so on; which is all very true thus stated, did they not apply it unfairly, and call that use of the world *moderate*, and *innocent*, which the Apostles would call being *conformed* to the world, and serving mammon instead of God.

And thus, before showing you what is meant by Christ's commandments not being grievous, I have said what is *not* meant by it. It is *not* meant that Christ dispenses with strict religious obedience; the whole language of Scripture is against such a notion. "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of

heaven[6]." "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all[7]." Whatever is meant by Christ's yoke being easy, Christ does not encourage sin. And again, whatever is meant, still I repeat, as a matter of fact, most men find it not easy. So far must not be disputed. Now then let us proceed, in spite of this admission, to consider how He fulfils His engagements to us, that His ways are ways of pleasantness.

1. Now, supposing some superior promised you any gift in a particular way, and you did not follow his directions, would *he* have broken his promise, or you have voluntarily excluded yourselves from the advantage? Evidently you would have brought about your own loss; you might, indeed, think his offer not worth accepting, burdened (as it was) with a condition annexed to it, still you could not in any propriety say that *he* failed in his engagement. Now when Scripture promises us that its commandments shall be easy, it couples the promise with the injunction that we should seek God *early*. "I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me *early* shall find Me[8]." Again: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth[9]." These are Solomon's

[6] Matt. v. 19. [7] James ii. 10. [8] Prov. viii. 17. [9] Eccles. xii. 1.

words; and if you require our Lord's own authority, attend to His direction about the children: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of *such* is the kingdom of God[1]." Youth is the time of covenant with us, when He first gives us His Spirit; first giving *then*, that we may *then* forthwith begin our return of obedience to Him; not then giving it, that we may delay our thank-offering for twenty, thirty, or fifty years! Now it is obvious that obedience to God's commandments is ever easy, and almost without effort to those who begin to serve Him from the beginning of their days; whereas, those who wait a while, find it grievous in proportion to their delay.

For consider how gently God leads us on in our early years, and how very gradually He opens upon us the complicated duties of life. A child at first has hardly anything to do but to obey his parents; of God he knows just as much as they are able to tell him, and he is not equal to many thoughts either about Him or about the world. He is almost passive in their hands who gave him life; and, though he has those latent instincts about good and evil, truth and falsehood, which all men have, he does not know enough, he has

[1] Mark x. 14.

not had experience enough, from the contact of external objects, to elicit into form and action those innate principles of conscience, or make himself conscious of the existence of them.

And, while on the one hand his range of duty is very confined, observe how he is assisted in performing it. First, he has no bad habits to hinder the suggestions of his conscience; indolence, pride, ill-temper, do not then act as they afterwards act, when the mind has accustomed itself to disobedience, as stubborn, deep-seated impediments in the way of duty. To obey requires an effort, of course; but an effort like the bodily effort of the child's rising from the ground when he has fallen on it; not the effort of shaking off drowsy sleep; not the effort (far less) of violent bodily exertion in a time of sickness and long weakness: and the first effort made, obedience on a second trial will be easier than before, till at length it will be easier to obey than not to obey. A good habit will be formed, where otherwise a bad habit would have been formed. Thus the child, we are supposing, would begin to have a character; no longer influenced by every temptation to anger, discontent, fear, and obstinacy in the same way as before; but with something of firm principle in his heart to repel them in a defensive way, as a shield repels darts. In the

mean time the circle of his duties would enlarge; and, though for a time the issue of his trial would be doubtful to those who (as the Angels) could see it, yet, should he, as a child, consistently pursue this easy course for a few years, it may be, his ultimate salvation would be actually secured, and might be predicted by those who could see his heart, though he would not know it himself. Doubtless new trials would come on him; bad passions, which he had not formed a conception of, would assail him; but a soul thus born of God, in St. John's words, "sinneth not, but he that is begotten of God, keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not[2]." "His seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God[3]." And so he would grow up to man's estate, his duties at length attaining their full range, and his soul being completed in all its parts for the due performance of them. This *might* be the blessed condition of every one of us, did we but follow from infancy what we know to be right; and in Christ's early life, (if we may dare to speak of Him in connexion with ourselves,) it *was* fulfilled while He increased day by day sinlessly in wisdom as in stature, and in favour with God and man. But my present

[2] 1 John v. 18. [3] 1 John iii. 9.

object of speaking of this gradual growth of holiness in the soul, is, (not to show what we might be, had we the heart to obey God,) but to show *how easy* obedience would in that case be to us; consisting, as it would, in no irksome ceremonies, no painful bodily discipline, but in the free-will offerings of the *heart*, of the heart which had been gradually, and by very slight occasional efforts, trained to love what God and our conscience approve.

Thus Christ's commandments, viewed *as He enjoins them on us*, are not grievous. They *would* be grievous if put upon us all at once; but they are *not* heaped on us, according to *His* order of dispensing them, which goes upon an harmonious and considerate plan; by little and little, first one duty, then another, then both, and so on. Moreover, they come upon us, while the safeguard of virtuous principle is forming naturally and gradually in our minds by our very deeds of obedience, and is following them as their reward. Now, if men will not take their duties in Christ's order, but are determined to delay obedience, with the intention of setting about their duty some day or other, and then making up for past time, is it wonderful that they find it grievous and difficult to perform? that they are overwhelmed with the arrears of their great work, that they are entangled

and stumble amid the intricacies of the Divine system which has progressively enlarged upon them? And is Christ under obligation to stop that system, to recast His providence, to take these men out of their due place in the Church, to save them from the wheels that are crushing them, and to put them back again into some simple and more childish state of trial, where (though they cannot have less to unlearn) they, at least, may for a time have less to do?

2. All this being granted, it still may be objected, since (as I have allowed) the commandments of God *are* grievous to the generality of men, where is the use of saying what men *ought* to be, when we know what they *are?* and how is it fulfilling a promise that His commandments *shall not* be grievous, by informing us that they *ought not* to be? It is one thing to say that the Law is in itself holy, just, and good, and quite a different thing to declare it is not *grievous* to sinful man.

In answering this question, I fully admit that our Saviour spoke of man *as he is,* as a sinner, when He said His yoke should be easy to him. Certainly He came not to call righteous men, but sinners. Doubtless we are in a very different state from that of Adam before his fall; and doubtless, in spite of this, St. John says that even to fallen men His commandments are not grievous. On

the other hand I grant, that if man *cannot* obey God, obedience *must* be grievous; and I grant too (of course) that man by nature *cannot* obey God. But observe, nothing has here been said, nor by St. John in the text, of man as by nature born in sin; but of man as a *child of grace*, as Christ's purchased possession, who goes *before* us with His mercy, puts the blessing first, and then adds the command; regenerates us and *then* bids us obey. Christ bids us do nothing that we cannot do. He repairs the fault of our nature, even before it manifests itself in act. He cleanses us from original sin, and rescues us from the wrath of God by the sacrament of baptism. He gives us the gift of His Spirit, and then He says, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" and is *this* grievous?

When, then, men allege their bad nature as an excuse for their *dislike of* God's commandments, if, indeed, they are heathens, let them be heard, and an answer may be given to them even as such. But with heathens we are not now concerned. These men make their complaint as *Christians*, and as Christians they are most unreasonable in making it; God having provided a remedy for their natural incapacity in the gift of His Spirit. Hear St. Paul's words, "If through the offence of

one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many . . . Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord[4]."

And there *are* persons, let it never be forgotten, who have so followed God's leading providence from their youth up, that to them His commandments not only are not grievous, but never have been: and that there *are* such, is the condemnation of all who are not such. They have been brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord[5];" and they now live in the love and "the peace of God which passeth all understanding[6]." Such are they whom our Saviour speaks of, as "just persons which need no repentance[7]." Not that they will give that account of themselves, for they are full well conscious in their own hearts of sins innumerable, and habitual infirmity. Still, in spite of stumblings and falls in their spiritual course, they have on the whole persevered. As children they served God on the whole; they disobeyed, but they recovered their lost ground; they sought God and were accepted. Perhaps their

[4] Rom. v. 15—21.
[5] Eph. vi. 4.
[6] Phil. iv. 7.
[7] Luke xv.

young faith gave way for a time altogether; but even then they contrived with keen repentance, and strong disgust at sin, and earnest prayers, to make up for lost time, and keep pace with the course of God's providence. Thus they have *walked* with God, not indeed step by step with Him: never before Him, often loitering, stumbling, falling to sleep; yet in turn starting and "*making haste* to keep His commandments," "running and prolonging not the time." Thus they proceed, not, however, of themselves, but as upheld by His right hand, and guiding their steps by His Word; and though they have nothing to boast of, and know their own unworthiness, still they are witnesses of Christ to all men, as showing what man *can* become, and what all Christians ought to be; and at the last day, being found meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, they "condemn the world" as Noah did, and become "heirs of the righteousness which is by faith," according to the saying, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith[s]."

And now, to what do the remarks I have been making tend, but to this?—to humble every one of us. For, however faithfully we have obeyed God, and however early we began to do so, surely

[s] 1 John v. 4.

we might have begun sooner than we did, and might have served Him more heartily. We cannot but be conscious of this. Individuals among us may be more or less guilty, as the case may be; but the best and the worst among us here assembled, may well unite themselves together so far as this, to confess they "have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep," "have followed *too much* the devices and desires of their own hearts," have "no health" in themselves as being "miserable offenders." Some of us may be nearer Heaven, some further from it; some may have a good hope of salvation, and others, (God forbid! but it may be,) others *no* present hope. Still let us unite now as one body in confessing, (to the better part of us such confession will be more welcome, and to the worse it is more needful,) in confessing ourselves sinners, deserving God's anger, and having no hope except "according to his promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord." He who first regenerated us and then gave His commandments, and then was so ungratefully deserted by us, He again it is that must pardon and quicken us after our accumulated guilt, if we are to be pardoned. Let us then trace back in memory (as far as we can) our early years; what we were when five years old, when ten, when fifteen, when twenty! what our state would have been as far as

we can guess it, had God taken us to our account at any age before the present. I will not ask how it would go with us, were we *now* taken; we will suppose the best.

Let each of us (I say) reflect upon his own most gross and persevering neglect of God at various seasons of his past life. How considerate He has been to us! How did He shield us from temptation! how did He open His will gradually upon us, as we might be able to bear it[9]! how has He done all things well, so that the spiritual work might go on calmly, safely, surely! How did He lead us on, duty by duty, as if step by step upwards, by the easy rounds of that ladder whose top reaches to Heaven? Yet how did we thrust ourselves into temptation! how did we refuse to come to Him that we might have life! how did we daringly sin against light! And what was the consequence? that our work grew beyond our strength; or rather that our strength grew less as our duties increased; till at length we gave up obedience in despair. And yet then He still tarried and was merciful unto us; He turned and looked upon us to bring us into repentance; and we for a while were moved. Yet, even then our wayward hearts could not keep up to their own

[9] 1 Cor. x. 13.

resolves; letting go again the heat which Christ gave them, as if made of stone, and not of living flesh. What could have been done more to His vineyard, that He hath not done in it[1]? "O my people (He seems to say to us) what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; . . . what doth the Lord require of thee, but justice, mercy, and humbleness of mind[2]?" He hath showed us what is good. He has borne and carried us in His bosom, "lest at any time we should dash our foot against a stone[3]." He shed His Holy Spirit upon us that we might love Him. And "*this* is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous." Why, then, have they been grievous to us? Why have we erred from His ways, and hardened our hearts from His fear? Why do we this day stand ashamed, yea, even confounded, because we bear the reproach of our youth?

Let us then turn to the Lord, while yet we may. Difficult it will be, in proportion to the distance we have departed from Him. Since every one might have done more than he has done, every

[1] Isaiah v. 4. [2] Micah vi. 3—8. [3] Psalm xci. 12.

one has suffered losses he never can make up. We have made His commands grievous to us: we must bear it; let us not attempt to explain them away because they *are* grievous. We never can wash out the stains of sin. God may forgive, but the sin has had its work, and its memento is set up in the soul. God sees it there. Earnest obedience and prayer will gradually remove it. Still, what miserable loss of time is it in our brief life, to be merely undoing (as has become necessary) the evil which we have done, instead of going on to perfection! If by God's grace we shall be able in a measure to sanctify ourselves in spite of our former sins, yet how much more *should* we have attained, had we always been engaged in His service!

These are bitter and humbling thoughts, but they are good thoughts if they lead us to repentance. And this leads me to one more observation, with which I conclude.

If any one who hears me is at present moved by what I have said, and feels the remorse and shame of a bad conscience, and forms any sudden good resolution, let him take heed to follow it up at once by *acting upon* it. I earnestly beseech him so to do. For this reason;—because if he does not, he is beginning a habit of inattention and insensibility. God *moves* us in order to make the

beginning of duty *easy*. If we do not attend, He *ceases* to move us. Any of you, my brethren, who will not take advantage of this considerate providence, if you will not turn to God now with a *warm* heart, you will hereafter be obliged to do so, (if you do so at all,) *with a cold heart*;—which is much harder. God keep you from this!

SERMON II.

THE RELIGIOUS USE OF EXCITED FEELINGS.

LUKE viii. 38, 39.

"The man out of whom the devils were departed, besought Him that he might be with Him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee."

IT is very natural in the man whom our Lord had set free from this dreadful visitation, to wish to continue with Him. Doubtless his mind was transported with joy and gratitude; whatever consciousness he might possess of his real wretchedness while the devil tormented him, now at least, on recovering his reason, he would understand that he had been in a very miserable state, and he would feel all the lightness of spirits and activity of mind, which attend any release from suffering or constraint. Under these circumstances he would imagine himself to be in a new world; he had found deliverance; and what was more, a Deliverer too, who stood before him.

And whether from a wish to be ever in His divine presence ministering to Him, or from a fear lest Satan would return, nay, with seven-fold power, did he lose sight of Christ, or from an undefined notion that all his duties and hopes were now changed, that his former pursuits were unworthy of him, and that he must follow up some great undertakings with the new ardour he felt glowing within him;—from one or other, or all of these feelings combined, he besought our Lord that he might be with Him. Christ imposed this attendance as a command on others; He bade, for instance, the young ruler follow Him; but He gives opposite commands, according to our tempers and likings; He thwarts us, that He may try our faith. In the case before us He suffered not, what at other times he had bidden. "Return to thine own house," He said, or as it is in St. Mark's Gospel, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee[1]." He directed the current of his newly-awakened feelings into another channel; as if He said, "Lovest thou Me? this do; return home to your old occupations and pursuits. You did them ill before, you lived to the world; do them well now,

[1] Mark v. 19.

live to Me. Do your duties little as well as great, heartily for My sake; go among your friends; show them what God hath done for thee; be an example to them, and teach them [2]." And further, as He said on another occasion, "Show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a testimony unto them [3]?"—show forth that greater light and truer love which you now possess in a conscientious, consistent, obedience to all the ordinances and rites of your religion.

Now from this account of the restored demoniac, his request, and our Lord's denial of it, a lesson may be drawn for the use of those who, having neglected religion in early youth, at length begin to have serious thoughts, try to repent, and wish to serve God better than hitherto, though they do not well know how to set about it. We know that God's commandments are pleasant and "rejoice the heart," if we accept them in the order and manner in which He puts them upon us; that Christ's yoke, as He has promised, is (on the whole) very easy, if we submit to it betimes; that the practice of religion is full of comfort to those, who being first baptized with the Spirit of grace, receive thankfully His influences as their minds

[2] Col. iii. 17. [3] Matt. viii. 4.

open, inasmuch as they are gradually and almost without sensible effort on their part, imbued in all their heart, soul, and strength, with that true heavenly life which will last for ever.

But here the question meets us, "But what are those to do who *have* neglected to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and so have lost all claim on Christ's promise, that His yoke shall be easy, and His commandments not grievous? I answer, that of course they must not be surprised if obedience is with them a laborious up-hill work all their days; nay, as having been "once enlightened, and partaken of the Holy Ghost" in baptism, they would have no right to complain even though "it were impossible for them to renew themselves again unto repentance." But God is more merciful than this just severity; merciful not only above our deservings, but even above His own promises. Even for those who have neglected Him when young, He has found, (if they will avail themselves of it,) some sort of remedy of the difficulties in the way of obedience which they have brought upon themselves by sinning; and what this remedy is, and how it is to be used, I proceed to describe in connexion with the account in the text.

The help I speak of is the excited feeling with which repentance is at first attended. True it is,

that all the passionate emotion, or fine sensibility, which ever man displayed, will never by itself make us change our ways, and do our duty. Impassioned thoughts, high aspirations, sublime imaginings, have no strength in them. They can no more make a man obey consistently, than they can move mountains. If any man truly repent, it must be in consequence, not of these, but of a settled conviction of his guilt, and a deliberate resolution to leave his sins and serve God. Conscience, and Reason in subjection to Conscience, *these* are those powerful instruments (under grace) which change a man. But you will observe, that though Conscience and Reason lead us to resolve on and to attempt a new life, they cannot at once make us *love* it. It is long practice and habit which make us love religion; and in the beginning, obedience, doubtless, is very grievous to habitual sinners. Here then is the use of those earnest, ardent feelings of which I just spoke, and which attend on the first exercise of conscience and reason,—to take away from the *beginnings* of obedience its *grievousness*, to give us an impulse which may carry us over the first obstacles, and send us on our way rejoicing. Not as if all this excitement of mind were to last, (which cannot be,) but it will do its office in thus setting us off; and then will leave us to the more sober and

higher comfort resulting from that real *love* for religion, which obedience itself will have by that time begun to form in us, and will gradually go on to perfect.

Now it is well to understand this fully, for it is often mistaken. When sinners are led to think seriously, stronger feelings generally precede or attend their reflections about themselves. Some book they have read, some conversation of a friend, some remarks they have heard made in church, or some occurrence or misfortune, rouses them. Or, on the other hand, if in any more calm and deliberate manner they have commenced their self-examination, yet in a little time the very view of their manifold sins, of their guilt, and their heinous ingratitude to their God and Saviour, breaking upon them, and being new to them, strikes, and astonishes, and then agitates them. Here, then, let them know the *intention* of all this excitement of mind in the order of Divine providence. It will not continue, it arises from the novelty of the view presented to them. As they become accustomed to religious contemplations, it will wear away. It is not religion itself, though it is accidentally connected with it, and may be made a means of leading them into a sound religious course of life. It is graciously intended to be a set-off in their case against the

first distastefulness and pain of doing their duty; it must be used as such, or it will be of no use at all, or worse than useless. My brethren, bear this in mind, (and I may say this generally, not confining myself to the excitement which attends repentance, but of all that natural emotion prompting us to do good, which we involuntarily feel on various occasions,) it is given you in order that you may find it easy to obey at starting. Therefore obey *promptly*; make use of it whilst it lasts; it waits for no man. Do you feel natural pity towards some case which reasonably demands your charity? or the impulse of generosity in a case where you are called to act a manly self-denying part? Whatever the emotion may be, whether these or any other, do not imagine you will always feel it. Whether you avail yourselves of it or not, still any how you will feel less and less, and, as life goes on, at last will not feel such sudden vehement excitement at all. But this is the difference between seizing or letting slip these opportunities;—if you avail yourselves of them for acting, and yield to the impulse so far as conscience tells you to do, you have made a leap (so to say) across a gulf, to which your ordinary strength is not equal; you will have secured the beginning of obedience, and the further steps in the course are (generally speaking) far easier than

those which first determine its direction. And so, to return to the case of those who feel any accidental remorse for their sins violently, exerting itself in their hearts, I say to them, Do not loiter; go home to your friends, and repent in *deeds* of righteousness and love; hasten to commit yourselves to certain definite *acts* of obedience. Doing is at a far greater distance from intending to do than you at first sight imagine. Join them together while you can; you will be depositing your good feelings into your heart itself by thus making them influence your conduct; and they will "spring up into fruit." This was the conduct of the conscience-stricken Corinthians, as described by St. Paul; who rejoiced "not that they were made *sorry*, (not that their feelings merely were moved,) but that they sorrowed *to change of mind* . . . For godly sorrow (he continues) worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death[4]."

But now let us ask how do men usually conduct themselves in matter of fact, when under visitings of conscience for their past sinful lives? They are far from thus acting. They look upon the

[4] 2 Cor. vii. 9, 10.

turbid zeal and feverish devotion which attend their repentance, not as in part the corrupt offspring of their own previously corrupt state of mind, and partly a gracious natural provision, only temporary to encourage them to set about their reformation, but as the substance and real excellence of religion. They think that to be thus agitated is to be religious; they indulge themselves in these warm feelings for their own sake, resting in them as if they were then engaged in a religious exercise, and boasting of them as if they were an evidence of their own exalted spiritual state; not *using them*, (the one only thing they ought to do,) using them as an incitement to *deeds* of love, mercy, truth, meekness, holiness. After they have indulged this luxury of feeling for some time, the excitement of course ceases; they do not feel as they did before. This (I have said) might have been anticipated, but they do not understand it so. See then their unsatisfactory state. They have lost an opportunity of overcoming the first difficulties of active obedience, and so of fixing their conduct and character, which may never occur again. This is one great misfortune; but more than this, what a perplexity they have involved themselves in! Their warmth of feeling is gradually dying away. Now they

think that *in it* true religion consists; therefore they believe that they are losing their faith, and falling into sin again.

And this, alas, *is* too often the case: they *do* fall away, for they have no root in themselves. Having neglected to turn their feelings into principles by acting upon them, they have no inward strength to overcome the temptation to live as the world, which continually assails them. Their minds have been acted upon as water by the wind, which raises waves for a time, then ceasing, leaves the water to subside into its former stagnant state. The precious opportunity of improvement has been lost; "and the latter end is worse with them than the beginning[5]."

But let us suppose, that when they first detect this declension (as they consider it,) they are alarmed, and look around for a means of recovering themselves. What do they do? Do they at once begin those practices of lowly obedience which alone can prove them to be Christ's at the last day? such as the government of their tempers, the regulation of their time, self-denying charity, truth-telling sobriety. Far from it; they despise this plain obedience to God as a mere unenlightened morality as they call it, and they seek

[5] 2 Pet. ii. 20.

for potent stimulants to continue their minds in that state of excitement which they have been taught to consider the essence of a religious life, and which they cannot produce by the means which before excited them. They have recourse to new doctrines, or follow strange teachers, in order that they may dream on in this their artificial devotion, and may avoid that conviction which is likely sooner or later to burst upon them, that emotion and passion are in our power indeed to repress, but not to *excite;* that there is a limit to the tumults and swellings of the heart, foster them as we will; and, when that time comes, the poor, mis-used soul is left exhausted and resourceless. Instances are not rare in the world of that fearful, ultimate state of hard-heartedness which then succeeds; when the miserable sinner believes indeed as the devils may, yet not even with the devils' trembling, but sins on without fear.

Others, again, there are, who, when their feelings fall off in strength and fervency, are led to despond; and so are brought down to fear and bondage, when they might have been rejoicing in cheerful obedience. These are the better sort, who, having something of true religious principle in their hearts, still are misled in part, so far, that is, as to rest in their feelings as tests of holiness; therefore they are distressed and

alarmed at their own tranquillity, which they think a bad sign, and, being dispirited, lose time, others outstripping them in the race.

And others might be mentioned who are led by this same first eagerness and zeal into a different error. The restored sufferer in the text wished to be with Christ. Now it is plain all those who indulge themselves in the false devotion I have been describing, may be said to be desirous of thus keeping themselves in Christ's immediate sight, instead of returning to their own home, as He would have them, that is, to the common duties of life; and they do this, some from weakness of faith, as if He could not bless them, and keep them in the way of grace, though they pursued their worldly callings; others from an ill-directed love of Him. But there are others, I say, who when they are awakened to a sense of religion, forthwith despise their former condition altogether, as beneath them; and think that they are now called to some high and singular office in the Church. These mistake their duty, as those already described neglect it; they do not waste their time in mere good thoughts and good words, as the others, but they are impetuously led on to *wrong acts*, and that from the influence of those same strong emotions which they have not learned

to use aright or direct to their proper end. But to speak of these now at any length, would be beside my subject.

To conclude;—let me repeat and urge upon you, my brethren, the lesson which I have deduced from the narrative of which the text forms part. Your Saviour calls you from infancy to serve Him, and has arranged all things well, so that His service shall be perfect freedom. Blessed above all men are they who heard His call then, and served Him day by day, as their strength to obey increased. But further, are you conscious that you have more or less neglected this gracious opportunity, and suffered yourselves to be tormented by Satan? See, He calls you a second time; He calls you by your roused affections once and again, ere He leave you finally. He brings you back for the time (as it were) to a second youth by the urgent persuasions of excited fear, gratitude, love, and hope. He again places you for an instant in that early, unformed state of nature when habit and character were not. He takes you out of yourselves, robbing sin for a season of its in-dwelling hold upon you. Let not those visitings pass away "as the morning cloud and the early dew [6]." Surely, you

[6] Hosea vi. 4.

must still have occasional compunctions of conscience for your neglect of Him. Your sin stares you in the face; your ingratitude to God affects you. Follow on to know the Lord, and to secure His favour by *acting* upon these impulses; by them He pleads with you, as well as by your conscience; they are the instruments of His Spirit, stirring you up to seek your true peace. Nor be surprised, though you obey them, that they die away; they have done their office, and, if they die, it is but as blossom changes into the fruit, which is far better. They *must* die. Perhaps you will have to labour in darkness afterwards, out of your Saviour's sight, in the home of your own thoughts, surrounded by sights of this world, and showing forth His praise among those who are cold-hearted. Still be quite sure that resolute, consistent obedience, though unattended with high transport and warm emotion, is far more acceptable to Him than all those passionate longings to live in His sight, which look more like religion to the uninstructed. At the very best these latter are but the graceful beginnings of obedience, graceful and becoming in children, but in grown spiritual men indecorous, as the sports of boyhood would be in advanced years. Learn to live by faith, which is a calm,

deliberate, rational principle, full of peace and comfort, and sees Christ, and rejoices in Him, though sent away from His presence to labour in the world. You will have your reward. He will "see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

SERMON III.

RELIGIOUS EMOTION.

MARK xiv. 31.

"But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with Thee I will not deny Thee in any wise."

IT is not my intention to make St. Peter's fall the direct subject of our consideration to-day, though I have taken this text; but to suggest to you an important truth, which that fall, together with other events at the same season, especially enforces; viz. that violent impulse is not the same as a firm *determination*,—that men may have their religious feelings roused, without being on that account at all the more likely to obey God in practice, rather the less likely. This important truth is in various ways brought before our minds at the season sacred to the memory of Christ's betrayal and death. The contrast displayed in the Gospels between His behaviour on the one hand, as the time of His crucifixion drew near, and that both of His disciples and the Jewish

populace on the other, is full of instruction, if we will receive it; *He* steadily fixing His face to endure those sufferings which were the atonement for our sins, yet without aught of mental excitement or agitation; His disciples and the Jewish multitude first protesting their devotion to Him in vehement language, then, the one deserting Him, the other even clamouring for His crucifixion. He entered Jerusalem in triumph; the multitude cutting down branches of palm-trees, and strewing them in the way, as in honour of a king and conqueror[1]. He had lately raised Lazarus from the dead; and so great a miracle had given Him great temporary favour with the populace. Multitudes flocked to Bethany to see Him and Lazarus[2]; and when He set out for Jerusalem where He was to suffer, they, little thinking they would soon cry, "Crucify Him," went out to meet Him with the palm-branches, and hailing Him as their Messiah, led Him on into the holy city. Here was an instance of a *popular* excitement. The next instance of excited feeling is found in that melancholy self-confidence of St. Peter, contained in the text. When our Saviour foretold Peter's trial and fall, Peter at length "spake the more vehemently, If I should die

[1] Matt. xxi. 8. John xii. 13. [2] John xii. 1—18.

with Thee, I will not deny Thee in any wise." Yet in a little while both the people and the Apostle abandoned their Messiah; the ardour of their devotion had run its course.

Now it may, perhaps, appear as if the circumstance I am pointing out, remarkable as it is, still is one on which it is of little use to dwell, when addressing a mixed congregation, on the ground that most men feel too *little* about religion. And it may be thence argued, that the aim of Christian teaching rather should be to rouse them from insensibility, than to warn them against excess of religious feeling. I answer, that to mistake mere transient emotion, or mere good thoughts for obedience, is a far commoner deceit than at first sight appears. How many a man is there, who, when his conscience upbraids him for neglect of duty, comforts himself with the reflection that he has never treated the subject of religion with open scorn,—that he has from time to time had serious thoughts,—that on certain solemn occasions he has been affected and awed,—that he has at times been moved to earnest prayer to God,—that he has had accidentally some serious conversation with a friend! This, I say, is a case of frequent occurrence among men called Christian. Again, there is a further reason for insisting upon this subject. No one (it is plain) can be religious

without having his heart in his religion; his affections must be actively engaged in it; and it is the aim of all Christian instruction to promote this. But if so, doubtless, there is great danger lest a perverse use should be made of the affections. In proportion as a religious duty is difficult, so is it open to abuse. For the very reason, then, that I desire to make you earnest in religion, must I also warn you against a counterfeit earnestness, which often misleads men from the plain path of obedience, and which most men are apt to fall into just on their first awakening to a serious consideration of their duty. It is not enough to bid you serve Christ in faith, fear, love, and gratitude; care must be taken that it is the faith, fear, love, and gratitude of a sound mind. That vehement tumult of zeal which St. Peter felt before his trial failed him under it. The open-mouthed admiration of the populace at our Saviour's miracle was suddenly changed to blasphemy. This may happen now as then; and it often happens in a way distressing to the Christian teacher. He finds it is far easier to interest men in the subject of religion, (hard though this be,) than to rule the spirit which he has excited. His hearers, when their attention is gained, soon begin to think he does not go far enough; then they seek means which he will not

supply, of encouraging and indulging their mere feelings, to the neglect of humble practical efforts to serve God. After a time, like the multitude, they suddenly turn round to the world, abjuring Christ altogether, or denying Him with Peter, or gradually sinking into a mere form of obedience, while they still think themselves true Christians, and secure of the favour of Almighty God.

For these reasons I think it is as important to warn men against impetuous feelings in religion, as to urge them to give their heart to it. I proceed, therefore, to explain more fully what is the connexion between strong emotions and sound Christian principle, and how far they are consistent with it.

Now that perfect state of mind at which we must aim, and which the Holy Spirit imparts, is a deliberate preference of God's service to every thing else, a determined resolution to give up all for Him; and a love for Him, not tumultuous and passionate, but such a love as a child bears towards his parents, calm, full, reverent, contemplative, obedient. Here, however, it may be objected, that this is not always possible: that we cannot help feeling emotion at times; that, even to take the case of parents and children, a man is at certain times thrown out of that quiet affection

which he bears towards his father and mother, and is agitated by various feelings; again, that zeal, for instance, though a Christian virtue, is almost inseparable from ardour and passion. To this I reply, that I am not describing the state of mind to which any one of us has *attained*, when I say it is altogether calm and meditative, but that which is the *perfect* state, that which we should aim at. I know it *is* often impossible, for various reasons, to avoid being agitated and excited; but the question before us is, whether we should *think much* of violent emotion, whether we should encourage it. Doubtless it is no sin to feel at times passionately on the subject of religion; it is natural in some men, and under certain circumstances it is praiseworthy in others. But these are accidents. As a general rule, the more religious men become, the calmer they become; and at all times the religious principle, viewed by itself, is calm, sober, and deliberate.

Let us review some of the accidental circumstances I speak of.

1. The natural tempers of men vary very much. Some men have ardent imaginations and strong feelings; and adopt, as a matter of course, a vehement mode of expressing themselves. No doubt it is impossible to make all men think

and feel alike. Such men of course may possess deep-rooted principle. All I would maintain is, that their ardour does not of itself make their faith deeper and more genuine; that they must not think themselves better than others on account of it; that they must beware of considering it a proof of their real earnestness, instead of narrowly searching into their conduct for the satisfactory *fruits* of faith.

2. Next, there are, besides, particular occasions on which excited feeling is natural, and even commendable; but not for its own sake, but *on account* of the peculiar circumstances under which it occurs. For instance; it is natural for a man to feel especial remorse at his sins when he first begins to think of religion; he *ought* to feel bitter sorrow and keen repentance. But all such emotion evidently is not the highest state of a Christian's mind; it is but the first stirring of grace in him. A sinner, indeed, can do no better; but in proportion as he learns more of the power of true religion, such agitation will wear away. What is this but saying, that change of mind is only the inchoate state of a Christian? Who doubts that sinners are bound to repent and turn to God? yet the Angels have no repentance; and who denies their peacefulness of soul to be a higher excellence than ours? The woman who had been

a sinner, when she came behind our Lord wept much, and washed his feet with tears[3]. It was well done in her; she did what she could; and was honoured with her Saviour's praise. Yet it is clear this was not a permanent state of mind. It was but the first step in religion, and would doubtless wear away. It was but the accident of a season. Had her faith no deeper root than this emotion, it would have soon come to an end, as Peter's zeal.

In like manner, whenever we fall into sin, (and how often is this the case!) the truer our faith is, the more we shall for the time be distressed, perhaps agitated. No doubt; yet it would be a strange procedure to make much of this disquietude. Though it is a bad sign if we do not feel it according to our mental temperament, yet if we do, what then? It argues no high Christian excellence; I repeat it, it is but the virtue of a very imperfect state. Bad is the best offering we can offer to God after sinning. On the other hand, the more consistent our habitual obedience, the less we shall be subject to such feelings.

3. And further, the accidents of life will occasionally agitate us:—affliction and pain; bad news; though here, too, the Psalmist describes

[3] Luke vii. 38.

the higher excellence of mind, viz. the calm confidence of the believer, who "will not be afraid of any evil tidings, *for* his heart standeth fast, and believeth in the Lord[4]." Times of persecution will agitate the mind; circumstances of especial interest in the fortunes of the Church will cause anxiety and fear. We see the influence of some of these causes in various parts of St. Paul's Epistles. Such emotion, however, is not the essence of true faith, though it accidentally accompanies it. In times of distress religious men will speak more openly on the subject of religion, and lay bare their feelings; at other times they will conceal them. They are neither better nor worse for so doing.

Now all this may be illustrated from Scripture. We find the same prayers offered, and the same resolutions expressed by good men, sometimes in a calm way, sometimes with more ardour. How quietly and simply does Agur offer his prayer to God! "Two things have I required of Thee; deny me them not before I die. Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me." St. Paul on the other hand, with greater fervency, because he was in more distressing circumstances, but with not more acceptableness on that account

[4] Psalm cxii. 7.

in God's sight, says, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound?" and so he proceeds. Again, Joshua says, simply but firmly, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." St. Paul says as firmly, but with more emotion, when his friends besought him to keep away from Jerusalem:—"What, mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." Observe how calm Job is in his resignation: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And on the other hand, how calmly that same Apostle expresses his assurance of salvation at the close of his life, who, during the struggle, was accidentally agitated:—"I am now ready to be offered. . . . . I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness [5]."

These remarks may suffice to show the relation which excited feelings bear to true religious principle. They are sometimes natural, sometimes suitable; but they are not religion itself. They come and go. They are not to be counted on, or

[5] Prov. xxxi. 7, 8. Phil. iv. 11, 12. Josh. xxiv. 15. Acts xxi. 13. Job i. xxi. 2 Tim. iv. 6—8.

encouraged; for, as in St. Peter's case, they may supplant true faith, and lead to self-deception. They will gradually lose their place within us as our obedience becomes confirmed;—partly because those men are kept in perfect peace, and sheltered from all agitating feelings, whose minds are stayed on God[6];—partly because these feelings themselves are fixed into habits by the power of faith, and instead of coming and going, and agitating the mind from their suddenness, they are permanently retained so far as there is any thing good in them, and give a deeper colour and a more energetic expression to the Christian character.

Now, it will be observed, that in these remarks I have taken for granted, as not needing proof, that the highest Christian temper is free from all vehement and tumultuous feeling. But, if we wish some evidence of this, let us turn to our Great Pattern, Jesus Christ, and examine what was the character of that perfect holiness which He alone of all men ever displayed.

And can we find any where such calmness and simplicity as marked His devotion and His obedience? When does He ever speak with fervour or vehemence? Or, if there be one or two

[6] Isaiah xxvi. 3.

words of His in His mysterious agony and death, characterized by an energy which we do not comprehend, and which sinners must silently adore, still how conspicuous and undeniable is His composure in the general tenour of His words and conduct! Consider the prayer He gave us; and this is the more to the purpose, for the very reason that He has given it as a model for our worship. How plain and unadorned is it? How few are the words of it! How grave and solemn the petitions! What an entire absence of tumult and feverish emotion! Surely our own feelings tell us, it could not be otherwise. To suppose it otherwise were an irreverence towards Him.—At another time when He is said to have "rejoiced in spirit," His thanksgiving is marked with the same undisturbed tranquillity. "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."—Again, think of His prayer in the garden. He then was in distress of mind beyond our understanding. Something there was, we know not what, which weighed heavy upon Him. He prayed He might be spared the extreme bitterness of His trial. Yet how subdued and how concise is His petition! "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee:

take away this cup from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt[7]." And this is but one instance, though a chief one, of that deep tranquillity of mind, which is conspicuous throughout the solemn history of the Atonement. Read the thirteenth chapter of St. John, in which He is described as washing His disciples' feet, Peter's in particular. Reflect upon His serious words addressed at several times to Judas who betrayed Him; and His conduct when seized by His enemies, when brought before Pilate, and lastly, when suffering on the cross. When does He set us an example of passionate devotion, of enthusiastic wishes, or of intemperate words?

Such is the lesson our Saviour's conduct teaches us. Now let me remind you, how diligently we are taught the same by our own Church. Christ gave us a prayer to guide us in praying to the Father; and upon this model our own Liturgy is strictly formed. You will look in vain in the Prayer-book for long or vehement Prayers! for it is but upon occasions that agitation of mind is right, but there is ever a call upon us for seriousness, gravity, simplicity, deliberate trust, deep-seated humility. Many persons, doubtless, think the Church prayers, for this very reason, cold and

[7] Luke x. 21. Mark xiv. 36.

formal. They do not discern their high perfection, and they think they could easily write better prayers. When such opinions are advanced, it is quite sufficient to turn our thoughts to our Saviour's precept and example. It cannot be denied that those who thus speak, ought to consider our Lord's prayer defective; and sometimes they are profane enough to think so, and to confess they think so. But I pass this by. Granting for argument's sake His *precepts* were intentionally defective, as delivered before the Holy Ghost descended, yet what will they say to His *example?* Can even the fullest light of the Gospel revealed after His resurrection, bring us His followers into the remotest resemblance to our Blessed Lord's holiness? yet how calm was He, who was perfect man, in His own obedience!

To conclude:—Let us take warning from St. Peter's fall. Let us not promise much; let us not talk much of ourselves; let us not be high-minded, nor encourage ourselves in impetuous bold language in religion. Let us take warning, too, from that fickle multitude who cried, first Hosanna, then Crucify. A miracle startled them into a sudden adoration of their Saviour;—its effect upon them soon died away. And thus the especial mercies of God sometimes excite us for a season. We feel Christ speaking to us through

our consciences and hearts; and we fancy He is assuring us we are His true servants, when He is but calling on us to receive Him. Let us not be content with saying "Lord, Lord," without "doing the thing which He says." The husbandman's son who said, "I go, sir," yet went not to the vineyard, gained nothing by his fair words. One secret act of self-denial, one sacrifice of inclination to duty, is worth all the mere good thoughts, warm feelings, passionate prayers, in which idle people indulge themselves. It will give us more comfort on our death-bed to reflect on one deed of self-denying mercy, purity, or humility, than to recollect the shedding of many tears, and the recurrence of frequent transports, and much spiritual exultation. These latter feelings come and go; they may or may not accompany hearty obedience; they are never tests of it; but good actions are the fruits of faith, and assure us that we are Christ's; they comfort us as an evidence of the Spirit working in us. By them we shall be judged at the last day; and though they have no worth in themselves, by reason of that infection of sin which gives its character to every thing we do, yet they will be accepted for His sake, who bore the agony in the garden, and suffered as a sinner on the cross.

SERMON IV.

PROMISING WITHOUT DOING.

MATTHEW xxi. 28—30.

"A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not."

OUR religious professions are at a far greater distance from our acting upon them, than we ourselves are aware. We know generally that it is our duty to serve God, and we resolve we will do so faithfully. We are sincere in thus generally desiring and purposing to be obedient, and we think we are in earnest; yet we go away, and presently, without any struggle of mind or apparent change of purpose, almost without knowing ourselves what we do,—we go away and do the very contrary to the resolution we have expressed. This inconsistency is exposed by our Blessed Lord in the second part of the parable which I have taken for my text. You will observe, that

in the case of the first son, who said he would not go work, and yet did go, it is said, "afterward he repented;" he underwent a positive change of purpose. But in the case of the second, it is merely said, "he answered, I go, Sir; and went not;"—for here there was *no* revolution of sentiment, nothing deliberate; he merely acted according to his habitual frame of mind; he did *not* go work, because it was contrary to his general character to work; only he did not know this. He said, "I go, Sir," sincerely, from the feeling of the moment; but when the words were out of his mouth, then they were forgotten. It was like the wind blowing against a stream, which seems for a moment to change its course in consequence, but in fact flows down as before.

To this subject I shall now call your attention, as drawn from the latter part of this parable, passing over the case of the repentant son, which would form a distinct subject in itself. "He answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not." We promise to serve God, we do not perform; and that, not from deliberate faithlessness in the particular case, but because it is our nature, our *way* not to obey, and *we* do not know this; we do not know ourselves, or what we are promising.—I will give several instances of this kind of weakness.

1. For instance; that of mistaking good feelings for real religious principle. Consider how often this takes place. It is the case with the young necessarily, who have not been exposed to temptation. They have (we will say) been brought up religiously, they wish to be religious, and so are objects of our love and interest; but they think themselves far more religious than they really are. They suppose they hate sin, and understand the Truth, and can resist the world, when they hardly know the meaning of the words they use. Again, how often is a man incited by circumstances to utter a virtuous wish, or propose a generous or valiant deed, and perhaps applauds himself for his own good feeling, and has no suspicion that he is not able to act upon it! In truth, he does not understand where the real difficulty of his duty lies. He thinks that the characteristic of a religious man is his having correct notions. It escapes him that there is a great interval between feeling and acting. He takes it for granted he can do what he wishes. He knows he is a free agent, and can on the whole do what he will; but he is not conscious of the load of corrupt nature and sinful habits which hang upon his will, and clog it in each particular exercise of it. He has borne these so long, that he is insensible to their existence. He knows that in little things, where

passion and inclination are excluded, he can perform as soon as he resolves. Should he meet in his walk two paths, to the right and left, he is sure he can take which he will at once, without any difficulty; and he fancies that obedience to God is not much more difficult than to turn to the right instead of the left.

2. One especial case of this self-deception is seen in delaying repentance. A man says to himself, "Of course, if the worst comes to the worst, if illness comes, or at least old age, I can repent." I do not speak of the dreadful presumption of such a mode of quieting conscience, (though many persons really use it who do not speak the words out, or are aware that they act upon it,) but, merely, the ignorance it evidences concerning our moral condition, and our power of willing and doing. If men can repent, why do they not do so at once? they answer, that "they intend to do so hereafter;" i. e. they do *not* repent because they *can*. Such is their argument; whereas, the very fact that they do not now, should make them suspect that there is a greater difference between intending and doing than they know of.

So very difficult is obedience, so hardly won is every step in our Christian course, so sluggish and inert our corrupt nature, that I would have a man disbelieve he can do one jot or tittle beyond

what he has already done; refrain from borrowing aught on the hope of the future, however good a security for it he seems to be able to show; and never take his good feelings and wishes in pledge for one single untried deed. Nothing but *past* acts are the vouchers for *future*. Past sacrifices, past labours, past victories over yourselves,—these, my brethren, are the tokens of the like in store; and doubtless of greater in store, for the path of the just is as the shining, growing light [1]. But trust nothing short of these. "Deeds, not words and wishes," this must be the watchword of your warfare and the ground of your assurance. But if you have done nothing firm and manly hitherto, if you are as yet the coward slave of Satan, and the poor creature of your lusts and passions, never suppose you will one day rouse yourselves from your indolence. Alas! there are men who walk the road to hell, always the while looking back at heaven, and trembling as they pace forward towards their place of doom. They hasten on as under a spell, shrinking from the consequences of their own deliberate doings. Such was Balaam. What would he have given if words and feelings might have passed for deeds! See how religious he was so far as profession

[1] Prov. iv. 18.

goes! How did he revere God in speech! How piously express a desire to die the death of the righteous! Yet he died in battle among God's *enemies*;—not suddenly overcome by temptation, only on the other hand, not suddenly turned to God by his good thoughts and fair purposes. But in this respect the power of sin differs from any literal spell or fascination, that we are, after all, willing slaves of it, and shall answer for following it. If "our iniquities, like the wind, take us away[2]," yet we can help this.

Nor is it only among beginners in religious obedience that there is this great interval between promising and performing. We can never answer how we shall act under new circumstances. A very little knowledge of life and of our own hearts will teach us this. Men whom we meet in the world turn out, in the course of their trial, so differently from what their former conduct promised, they view things so differently *before* they were tempted and *after*, that we, who see and wonder at it, have abundant cause to look to ourselves, not to be "high-minded" but to "fear." Even the most matured saints, those who imbibed in largest measure the power and fulness of Christ's Spirit, and worked righteousness most diligently,

[2] Isaiah lxiv. 6.

in their day, could they have been thoroughly scanned even by man, would (I am persuaded) have exhibited inconsistencies such as to surprise and shock their most ardent disciples. After all, one good deed is scarcely the pledge of another, though I just now said it was. The best men are uncertain; they are great, and they are little again; they stand firm, and then fall. Such is human virtue; — reminding us to call no one Master on earth, but to look up to our sinless and perfect Lord; reminding us to humble ourselves each within himself, and to reflect what we must appear to God, if even to ourselves and each other we seem so base and worthless; and showing clearly that all who are saved, even the least inconsistent of us, can be saved only by faith, not by works.

3. Here I am reminded of another plausible form of the same error. It is a mistake concerning what is meant by faith. We know Scripture tells us that God accepts those who have faith in Him. Now the question is, What *is* faith, and how can a man tell that he *has* faith? Some persons answer at once and without hesitation, that "to have faith, is to feel oneself to be nothing, and God every thing; it is to be convinced of sin, to be conscious one cannot save oneself, and to wish to be saved by Christ our

Lord; and that it is moreover to have the love of Him warm in one's heart, and to rejoice in Him, to desire His glory, and to resolve to live to Him and not to the world." But I will answer, with all due seriousness, as speaking on a serious subject, that this is *not* faith. Not that it is not necessary, (it is very necessary,) to be convinced, that we are laden with infirmity and sin, and without health in us, and to look for salvation solely to Christ's blessed sacrifice on the cross; and we may well be thankful if we are thus minded; but that a man may feel all this that I have described, vividly, and still not yet possess one particle of true religious faith. Why? Because there is an immeasurable distance between feeling right and doing right. A man may have all these good thoughts and emotions, yet, (if he has not yet hazarded them to the experiment of practice,) he cannot promise himself that he has any sound and permanent principle at all. If he has not yet acted upon them, we have no voucher, barely on *account* of them to believe that they are any thing but words. Though a man spoke like an angel, I would not believe him, on the mere ground of his speaking. Nay, till he acts upon them, he has not even evidence to himself, that he has true living faith. Dead faith, (as St. James says,) profits no man. Of course; the

Devils have it. What, on the other hand, is *living* faith? Do fervent thoughts make faith *living?* St. James tells us otherwise. He tells us *works,* deeds of obedience, are the life of faith. "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also[3]." So that those who think they really believe, because they have in word and thought surrendered themselves to God, are much too hasty in their judgment. They have done something, indeed, but not at all the most difficult part of their duty, which is to surrender themselves to God in deed and act. They have as yet done nothing to show they will not, after saying "I go," the next moment "go not;" nothing to show they will not act the part of the self-deceiving disciple, who said, "Though I die with Thee, I will not deny Thee;" yet straightway went and denied Christ thrice. As far as we know any thing of the matter, justifying faith has no existence independent of its particular definite acts. It may be described to be the temper under which men obey; the humble and earnest desire to please Christ which causes and attends on actual services. He who does one little deed of obedience, whether he denies himself some comfort to relieve the sick and

[3] James ii. 26.

needy, or curbs his temper, or forgives an enemy, or asks forgiveness for an offence committed by him, or resists the clamour or ridicule of the world, such an one (as far as we are given to judge) evinces more true faith than could be shown by the most fluent religious conversation, the most intimate knowledge of Scripture doctrine, or the most remarkable agitation and change of religious sentiments. Yet how many are there who sit still with folded hands, dreaming, doing nothing at all, thinking they have done every thing, or need do nothing, when they merely have had these good *thoughts*, which will save no one!

My object has been, as far as a few words can do it, to lead you to some true notion of the depths and deceitfulness of the heart, which we do not really know. It is easy to speak of human nature as corrupt in the general, to admit it in the general, and then get quit of the subject; as if, the doctrine being once admitted, there was nothing more to be done with it. But in truth we can have no real apprehension of the doctrine of our corruption, till we view the structure of our minds, part by part; and dwell upon and draw out the signs of our weakness, inconsistency, and ungodliness, which are such as can arise from

nothing but some strange original defect in our moral nature.

1. Now it will be well if such self-examination as I have suggested leads us to the habit of constant dependence upon the Unseen God, in whom "we live and move, and have our being." We are in the dark about ourselves. When we act, we are groping in the dark, and may meet with a fall any moment. Here and there, perhaps, we see a little;—or, in our attempts to influence and move our minds, we are making experiments (as it were) with some delicate and dangerous instrument, which works, we do not know how, and may produce unexpected and disastrous effects. The management of our heart is quite above us. Under these circumstances it becomes our comfort to look up to God. "Thou, God, seest me!" Such was the consolation of the forlorn Hagar in the wilderness. He knoweth whereof we are made, and He alone can uphold us. He sees with most appalling distinctness all our sins, all the windings and recesses of evil within us; yet it is our only comfort to know this, and to trust Him for help against ourselves. To those who have a right notion of their weakness, the thought of their Almighty Sanctifier and Guide is continually present. They believe in

the necessity of a spiritual influence to change and strengthen them, not as a mere abstract doctrine, but as a practical and most consolatory truth, daily to be fulfilled in their warfare with sin and Satan.

2. And this conviction of our excessive weakness must further lead us to try ourselves continually in little things, in order to prove our own earnestness; ever to be suspicious of ourselves, and, not only to refrain from promising much, but actually to put ourselves to the test to keep ourselves wakeful. A sober mind never enjoys God's blessings to the full; it draws back and refuses a portion to show its command over itself, It denies itself in trivial circumstances, even if nothing is gained by denying, but an evidence of its own sincerity. It makes trial of its own professions; and if it has been tempted to say any thing noble and great, or to blame another for sloth or cowardice, it takes itself at its word, and resolves to make some sacrifice (if possible) in little things, as a price for the indulgence of fine speaking, or as a penalty on its censoriousness. Much would be gained if we adopted this rule even in our professions of friendship and service one towards another; and never said a thing which we were not willing to do.

There is only one place where the Christian

allows himself to profess openly, and that is in Church. Here under the guidance of Apostles and Prophets, he says many things boldly, as speaking after them, and as before Him who searcheth the reins. There can be no harm in professing much directly to God, because, *while* we speak, we know He sees through our professions, and takes them for what they really are, *prayers*. How much, for instance, do we profess when we say the Creed! and in the Collects we put on the full character of a Christian. We desire and seek the best gifts, and declare our strong purpose to serve God with our whole hearts. By doing this, we remind ourselves of our duty; and withal, we humble ourselves by the taunt (so to call it) of putting upon our dwindled and unhealthy forms those ample and glorious garments which befit the upright and full-grown believer.

Lastly, we see from the parable, what is the course and character of human obedience on the whole. There are two sides of it. I have taken the darker side; the case of profession without practice, of saying "I go, Sir," and of not going. But what is the brighter side? Nothing better than to say, "I go not," and to repent and go. The more *common* condition of men is, not to know their inability to serve God, and readily to

answer for themselves; and so they quietly pass through life, as if they had nothing to fear. Their best estate, what is it, but to rise more or less in rebellion against God, to resist His commandments and ordinances, and then poorly to make up for the mischief they have done, by repenting and obeying? Alas! to be alive as a Christian, is nothing better than to struggle against sin, to disobey and repent. There has been but One among the sons of men who has said and done *consistently;* who said, "I come to do Thy will, O God," and without delay or hindrance did it. He came to show us what human nature might become, if carried on to its perfection. Thus He teaches us to think highly of our nature as viewed in Him; not (as some do) to speak evil of our nature and exalt ourselves personally, but while we acknowledge *our own* distance from heaven, to view our *nature* as renewed in Him, as glorious and wonderful beyond our thoughts. Thus He teaches us to be hopeful; and encourages us while conscience abases us. Angels seem little in honour and dignity, compared with that nature which the Eternal Word has purified by His own union with it. Henceforth, we dare aspire to enter into the heaven of heavens, and to live for ever in God's presence, because the first fruits of our race is already there in the Person of His Only-begotten Son.

SERMON V.

CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE.

LUKE xv. 18, 19.

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants."

THE very best that can be said of the fallen and redeemed race of Adam is, that they confess their fall, and condemn themselves for it, and try to recover themselves. And this state of mind, which is in fact the only possible religion left to sinners, is represented to us in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who is described as receiving, then abusing, and then losing God's blessings, suffering from their loss, and brought to himself by the experience of suffering. A poor service indeed to offer, but the best we can offer, to make obedience our second choice when the world deserts us, when that is dead and lost to us wherein we were held!

Let it not be supposed, because I say this, that I think that in the life-time of each one of us there is some clearly marked date at which he began to seek God, and from which he has served Him faithfully. This may be so in the case of this person or that, but it is far from being the rule. We may not so limit the mysterious work of the Holy Ghost. He condescends to plead with us continually, and what He cannot gain from us at one time, He gains at another. Repentance is a work carried on at diverse times, and but gradually and with many reverses perfected. Or rather, and without any change in the meaning of the word repentance, it is a work never complete, never entire,—unfinished both in its inherent imperfection, and on account of the fresh and fresh occasions which arise for exercising it. We are ever sinning, we must ever be renewing our sorrow and our purpose of obedience, repeating our confessions and our prayers for pardon. No need to look back to the first beginnings of our repentance, should we be able to trace these, as something solitary and peculiar in our religious course; we are *ever* but beginning; the most perfect Christian is to Himself but a beginner, a penitent prodigal, who has squandered God's gifts, and comes to Him to be tried over again, not as a son, but as a hired servant.

In this parable, then, we need not understand the description of the returning prodigal to imply that there is a state of disobedience and subsequent state of conversion, definitively marked in the life of Christians generally. It describes the state of all Christians at all times, and is fulfilled more or less, according to circumstances, in this case or that: fulfilled in one way and measure at the beginning of our Christian course, and in another at the end. So I shall now consider it, viz. as describing the *nature* of all true repentance.

1. First, observe, the prodigal son said, "I am no more worthy to be called Thy son, make me as one of Thy hired servants." We know that God's service is perfect freedom, not a servitude; but this it is in the case of those who have long served Him; at first it *is* a kind of servitude, it is a task till our likings and tastes come to be in unison with those which God has sanctioned. It is the happiness of Saints and Angels in heaven to take pleasure in their duty, and nothing but their duty; for their mind goes that one way, and pours itself out in obedience to God, spontaneously and without thought or deliberation, just as man *sins* naturally. This is the state to which we are tending if we give ourselves up to religion; but in its commencement, religion is necessarily

almost a task and a formal service. When a man begins to see his wickedness, and resolves on leading a new life, he asks, *What must I do?* he has a wide field before him, and he does not know how to enter it. He must be bid to do some particular plain acts of disobedience, to fix him. He must be told to go to Church regularly, to say his prayers morning and evening, and statedly to read the Scriptures. This will limit his efforts to a certain end, and relieve him of the perplexity and indecision which the greatness of his work at first causes. But who does not see that this going to Church, praying in private, and reading Scripture, must in his case be, in great measure, what is called a form and a task? Having been used to do as he would, and indulge himself, and having very little understanding or liking for religion, he cannot take pleasure in these religious duties; they will necessarily be a weariness to him; nay, he will not be able even to give his attention to them. Nor will he see the use of them; he will not be able to find they make him better, though he repeat them again and again. Thus his obedience at first is altogether that of a hired servant. "The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth[1]." This is Christ's account of

[1] John xv. 15.

him. The servant is not in his lord's confidence, does not understand what he is aiming at, or why he commands this and forbids that. He executes the commands given him, he goes hither and thither, punctually, but by the mere letter of the command. Such is the state of those who *begin* religious obedience. They do not see any thing come of their devotional or penitential services, nor do they take pleasure in them; they are obliged to defer to God's word simply because it is His word; to do which implies faith indeed, but also shows they are in that condition of a servant which the prodigal felt himself to be in at best.

Now, I insist upon this, because the conscience of a repentant sinner is often uneasy at finding religion a task to him. He thinks he ought to rejoice in the Lord at once, and it is true he is often told to do so; he is often taught to begin by cultivating high affections. Perhaps he is even warned against offering to God what is termed a *formal service.* Now this is reversing the course of a Christian's life. The prodigal son judged better, when he begged to be made one of his father's servants,—he knew his place. We *must begin* religion with what looks like a form. Our fault will be, not in beginning it as a form, but in continuing it as a form. For it is our duty

to be ever striving and praying to *enter* into the real spirit of our services, and in proportion as we understand them and love them, they will cease to be a form and a task, and will be the real expressions of our minds. Thus shall we gradually be changed in heart from servants into sons of Almighty God. And though from the very first, we must be taught to look to Christ as the Saviour of sinners, still His very love will frighten, while it encourages us, from the thought of our ingratitude. It will fill us with remorse and dread of judgment, for we are not as the heathen, we have received privileges, and have abused them.

2. So much then on the condition of the repentant sinner; next, let us consider the motives which actuate him in his endeavours to serve God. One of the most natural, and among the first that arise in the mind, is that of *propitiating* Him. When we are conscious to ourselves of having offended another, and wish to be forgiven, of course we look about for some *means* of setting ourselves right with him. If it be a slight offence, our overtures are in themselves enough, the mere expression that we wish our fault forgotten. But if we have committed some serious injury, or behaved with any special ingratitude, we, for a time, keep at a distance, from a doubt how we

shall be received. If we can get a common friend to mediate in our behalf, our purpose is best answered. But even in that case we are not satisfied with leaving our interests to another; we try to do something for ourselves; and on perceiving any signs of compassion or placability in the person offended, we attempt to approach him with propositions of our own, either very humble confession, or some acceptable service. It was under this feeling that Jacob attempted to conciliate the governor of Egypt (whom he knew not to be his son Joseph), with a present of "the best fruits in the land, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts and almonds." And this holds good when applied to the case of sinners desiring forgiveness from God. The marks of His mercy all around us are strong enough to inspire us with some general hope. The very fact that He still continues our life, and has not at once cast us into hell, shows that He is waiting awhile before the wrath comes upon us to the uttermost. Under these circumstances it is *natural* that the conscience-stricken sinner should look round him for some atonement with which to meet his God. And this in fact has been the usual course of religion in all ages. Whether "with burnt offerings and calves of a year old, with thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil, with the

offering of a man's first-born for his transgression, the fruit of his body for the sin of his soul;" or, in a higher way, "by doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God[1];" by some means or other, repentant sinners have attempted to win God's attention and engage His favour. And this mode has, before now, been graciously accepted by God, though He generally chose the gift which He would accept. Thus Jacob was instructed to sacrifice on the altar at Bethel, after his return from Padan-aram. David, on the other hand, speaks of the more spiritual sacrifice in the fifty-first Psalm: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." Such are the services of the penitent, as suggested by nature, and approved by God Himself in the Old Testament.

But now, turning to the parable of the prodigal son, we find nothing of this kind in it. There is no mention made here of any offering on his part to his father, any propitiatory work. This should be well observed. The truth is, that our Saviour has shown us in all things a more perfect way than was ever before shown to man. As He promises us a more exalted holiness, an exacter self-

[1] Micah vi 6—8.

command, a more generous self-denial, and a fuller knowledge of truth, so He gives us a more true and noble repentance. The most noble repentance (if a fallen being can be noble in his fall,) the most decorous conduct in a conscious sinner, is an *unconditional surrender* of himself to God, —not a bargaining about terms, not a scheming (so to call it) to be received back again, but an instant *surrender* of himself in the first instance. Without knowing what will become of him, whether God will spare or not, merely with so much hope in his heart as not utterly to despair of pardon, still not looking merely to *pardon* as an *end,* but rather looking to the claims of the Benefactor whom he has offended, and smitten with shame, and the sense of his ingratitude, he must *surrender himself* to his lawful Sovereign. He is a runaway offender; he must come back, as a very first step, before anything can be determined about him bad or good; he is a rebel, and must lay down his arms. Self-devised offerings might do in a less serious matter; as an atonement for sin, they imply a defective view of the evil and extent of sin in his own case. Such is that perfect way which nature shrinks from, but which our Lord enjoins in the parable,—a surrender. The prodigal son waited not for his father to show signs of placability. He did not merely

approach a space, and then stand as a coward, curiously inquiring, and dreading how his father felt towards him. He made up his mind at once to degradation at the best, perhaps to rejection. He arose and went straight on towards his father, with a collected mind; and though his relenting father saw him from a distance, and went out to meet him, still his purpose was that of an instant frank submission. Such must be Christian repentance: First we must put aside the idea of finding a remedy for our sin; then, though we feel the guilt of it, yet we must set out firmly towards God, not knowing for certain that we shall be forgiven. He indeed meets us on our way with the tokens of His favour, and so He bears up human faith, which else would sink under the apprehension of meeting the Most High God; still, for our repentance to be Christian, there must be in it that generous temper of self-surrender, the acknowledgment that we are unworthy to be called any more His sons, the abstinence from all ambitious hopes of sitting on His right hand or left, and the willingness to bear the heavy yoke of bond servants, if He should put it upon us.

This, I say, is Christian repentance. Will it be said, "It is too hard for a beginner?" True: but I have not been describing the case of a beginner.

The parable teaches us what the character of the true penitent is, not how men actually *at first* come to God. The longer we live, the more we may hope to *attain* this higher kind of repentance, viz. in proportion as we advance in the other graces of the perfect Christian character. The truest kind of repentance as little comes at first, as perfect conformity to any other part of God's Law. It is gained by long practice,—it will come at length. The dying Christian will fulfil the part of the returning prodigal more exactly than he ever did in his former years. When first we turn to God in the actual history of our lives, our repentance is mixed with all kinds of imperfect views and feelings. Doubtless there is in it something of the true temper of simple submission; but the wish of appeasing God on the one hand, or an hard-hearted insensibility about our sins on the other, mere selfish dread of punishment, or the expectation of a sudden easy pardon,—these, and such like principles, influence us, whatever we may say or may think we feel. It is indeed easy enough to have good words put into our mouths, and our feelings roused, and to profess the union of utter self-abandonment and enlightened sense of sin; but to claim is not really to possess these excellent tempers. Really to gain these is a work of time. It is when the Christian has long

fought the good fight of faith, and by experience knows how few and how imperfect are his best services; then it is that he is able to acquiesce, and most gladly acquiesces in the statement, that we are accepted by faith only in the merits of our Lord and Saviour. When he surveys his life at the close of it, what is there he can trust in? what act of it will stand the scrutiny of the Holy God? of course no part of it, so much is plain without saying a word. But further, what part of it even is a sufficient evidence to himself of his own sincerity and faithfulness? This is the point which I urge. How shall he know that he is still in a state of grace after all his sins? Doubtless he may have some humble hope of his acceptance. St. Paul speaks of the testimony of his conscience as consoling him; but his conscience also tells him of numberless actual sins, and numberless omissions of duty; and with the awful prospect of eternity before him, and in the weakness of declining health, how shall he collect himself to appear before God? Thus he is, after all, in the very condition of the returning prodigal, and cannot go beyond him, though he has served God ever so long. He can but *surrender* himself to God, as, after all, a worse than unprofitable servant, resigned to God's will, whatever it is, with more or less hope of pardon, as the case may be;

doubting not that Christ is the sole meritorious Author of all grace, resting simply on Him who, "if He will, can make him clean," but not without fears about himself, because unable, as he well knows, to read his own heart in that clear unerring way in which God reads it. Under these circumstances, how vain it is to tell him of his own good deeds, and to bid him look back on his past consistent life! This reflection will rarely comfort him; and, when it does, it will be the recollection of the instances of God's mercy towards him in former years, which will be the chief ground of encouragement in it. No, his true stay is, that Christ came "to call sinners to repentance," that "He died for the ungodly." He acknowledges and adopts, as far as he can, St. Paul's words, and nothing beyond them, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*, of whom I am chief[3]."

Who shall dare approach Christ at the dreadful day of judgment, who has rejected the calling of His Spirit here? Who shall then dare to surrender himself to the great God, when hell is opened ready to receive him? Alas! it is only because *some* hope is left to us that we dare give

[3] Matt. ix. 13; Rom. v. 6; 1 Tim. i. 15.

ourselves up to Him *here; despair* ever keeps away. But then, when He takes his seat as the severe Judge of sinners, who, among His slothful disobedient servants, will willingly present himself? Surely the time of *submission* will then be over; resignation has no place among fallen spirits; they are swept away by the uncontrollable power of God. "Bind him *hand and foot*, and take him away[4];" such will be the dreadful command. They *would* struggle if they *could*.

And in hell they will be still tormented, by the worm of proud rebellious hatred of God! Not even ages will reconcile them to a hard endurance of their fate, not even the dry apathy in which unbelievers on earth take refuge, will be allowed them. There is no fatalism in the place of torment. The devils see their doom was their own fault, yet they are unable to be sorry for it. It is their *will* that is in direct energetic variance with the will of God, and they know it.

Consider this, my brethren, and lay it to heart. Doubtless you must render yourselves to God's mercy here, or else be forced away before His anger hereafter.

"To-day, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts[5]."

[4] Matt. xxii. 13. [5] Heb. iii. 7—13.

SERMON VI.

CONTRACTED VIEWS IN RELIGION.

LUKE xv. 29.

"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends."

THERE is a general correspondence between this parable, and that in St. Matthew's gospel, of the two sons whom their father bade go work in his vineyard; but they differ as regards the character of the professedly obedient son: in St. Matthew he says, "I go, Sir, and went not;" in the parable before us he is of a far different class of Christians, though not without his faults. There is nothing to show that he is insincere in his profession, though in the text he complains in a very unseemly and foolish way. He bears a considerable resemblance to the labourers in the vineyard, who complained of their master; though they are

treated with greater severity. The elder brother of the prodigal complained of his father's kindness towards the penitent; the labourers of the vineyard murmured against the good-man of the house for receiving and rewarding those who came late to his service as liberally as themselves. They, however, spoke in selfishness and presumption; but he in perplexity, as it would appear, and distress of mind. Accordingly, he was comforted by his father, who graciously informed him of the reason of his acting as he had done. "Son, *thou* art ever with me," he says, "and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."

Now let us try to understand the feelings of the elder brother, and to apply the picture to the circumstances in which we find ourselves at present.

First, then, in the conduct of the father, there seemed, at first sight, an evident departure from the rules of fairness and justice. Here was a reprobate son received into his favour on the first stirrings of repentance. What was the use of serving him dutifully if there were no difference in the end between the righteous and the wicked? This is what we feel and act upon in life constantly. In doing good to the poor, for instance,

a chief object is to encourage industrious and provident habits; and it is evident we should hurt and disappoint the better sort, and defeat our object, if, after all, we did not take into account the difference of their conduct, though we promised to do so, but gave those who did not work nor save, all the benefits granted to those who did. The elder brother's case, then, seemed a hard one; and that, even without supposing him to feel jealous, or to have unsuitable notions of his own importance and usefulness. Apply this to the case of religion, and it still holds good. At first sight, the reception of the penitent sinner seems to interfere with the reward of the faithful servant of God. Just as the promise of pardon is abused by bad men to encourage themselves in sinning on, that grace may abound, so on the other hand it is misapprehended by the good, so as to dispirit them. For what is our great stay and consolation amid the perturbations of this world? The truth and justice of God. This is our one light in the midst of darkness. "He loveth righteousness, and hateth iniquity;" "just and right is He." Where else shall we find rest for our foot all over the world? Consider in how mysterious a state all things are placed; the wicked are uppermost in power and name, and the righteous are subjected to bodily pain and mental suffering, as if they did

not serve God. What a temptation is this to unbelief! The Psalmist felt it when he spoke of the prosperity of the wicked. "Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency[1]." It is to meet this difficulty that Almighty God has vouchsafed again and again to declare the unswerving rule of His government,—favour to the obedient, punishment to the sinner; that there is "no respect of persons with Him;" that "the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him[2]." Recollect how often this is declared in the book of Psalms. "The Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish." "The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; His countenance doth behold the upright." "With the merciful Thou wilt show Thyself merciful, with an upright man thou wilt show Thyself upright. With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure, and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward. For Thou wilt save the afflicted people, but wilt bring down high looks." "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about."

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 12, 13. [2] Rom. ii. 11. Ezek. xviii. 20.

"Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good[3]." These declarations, and numberless others like them, are familiar to us all; and why, I say, so often made, except to give us that one fixed point for faith to rest upon, while all around us is changing and disappointing us? viz. that we are quite sure of peace in the end, bad as things may now look, if we do but follow the rule of conscience, avoid sin, and obey God. Hence, St. Paul tells us that "he that cometh to God, must believe that He is a *rewarder* of them that diligently seek Him[4]." Accordingly, when we witness the inequalities of the present world, we comfort ourselves by reflecting they will be put right in another.

Now the restoration of sinners seems to interfere with this confidence; it seems, at first sight, to put bad and good on a level. And the feeling it excites in the mind is expressed in the parable by the words of the text: "These many years do I serve Thee, neither transgressed I at any time Thy commandment, yet I never have been welcomed and honoured with that peculiar joy which Thou showest towards the repentant sinner." This is the expression of an agitated mind, that

[3] Ps. i. 6; xi. 7; xviii. 25—27; xxxii. 10; cxxv. 4.
[4] Heb. xi. 6.

fears lest it be cast back upon the wide world, to grope in the dark without a God to guide and encourage it in its course.

The condescending answer of the Father in the parable is most instructive. It sanctions the great truth, which seemed in jeopardy, that it is *not* the same thing in the end to obey or disobey, expressly telling us that the Christian penitent is not placed on a footing with those who have consistently served God from the first. "Son, *thou* art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine:" that is, Why this sudden fear and distrust? can there be any misconception on thy part because I welcome thy brother? dost thou not yet understand Me? Surely thou hast known Me too long to suppose that *thou* canst lose by his gain. *Thou* art in My confidence. I do not make any outward display of kindness towards *thee*, for it is a thing to be taken for granted. We give praise and make professions to strangers, not to friends. Thou art My heir, all that I have is thine. "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Who could have thought that it were needful to tell to thee truths which thou hast heard all thy life long? Thou art *ever* with Me; and canst thou really grudge that I should, by one mere *act* of rejoicing, show My satisfaction at the sinner's recovery, and should console him with a promise of mercy, who,

before he heard of it, was sinking down under the dread of deserved punishment? "It was *meet* that we should make merry and be glad," thou as well as thy Father.—Such is our merciful God's answer to His suspicious servants, who think He cannot pardon the sinner without withdrawing His favour from them; and it contains in it both a consolation for the perplexed believer not to distrust Him: and again, a warning to the disobedient, not to suppose that repentance makes all straight and even, and puts a man in the same place as if he had never departed from grace given.

But let us now notice the unworthy feeling which appears in the conduct of the elder brother. "He was angry, and would not go" into the house. How may this be fulfilled in our own case?

There exists a great deal of infirmity and foolishness even in the better sort of men. This is not to be wondered at, considering the original corrupt state of their nature; however it is to be deplored, repented of, and corrected. Good men are, like Elijah, "jealous for the Lord God of hosts," and rightly solicitous to see his tokens around them, the pledges of His unchangeable just government; but then they mix with such good feelings undue notions of self-importance, of which they are not aware. This seemingly was the state of mind

which dictated the complaint of the elder brother.

This will especially happen in the case of those who are in the most favoured situations in the Church. All places possess their peculiar temptation. Quietness and peace, those greatest of blessings, constitute the trial of the Christians who enjoy them. To be cast on the world, and to see life, (as it is called,) is a vanity, and "drowns" the unstable "in destruction and perdition;" but while on the one hand, a religious man may thrive even in the world's pestilent air and on unwholesome food, so on the other hand, he may become sickly, unless he guards against it, from the very abundance of privileges vouchsafed to him in a peaceful lot. The elder brother had always lived at home; he had seen things go on one way, and, as was natural and right, got attached to them in that one way. But then he could not conceive that they possibly could go on in any other way; he thought he understood his Father's ways and principles far more than he did, and when an occurrence took place, for which he had hitherto met with no precedent, he lost himself, as being suddenly thrust aside out of the contracted circle in which he had hitherto walked. He was disconcerted, and angry with his Father. And so in religion, we have need to watch against that narrow-

ness of mind, to which we are tempted by the uniformity and tranquillity of God's providence towards us. We should be on our guard lest we suppose ourselves to have that clear knowledge of God's ways, as to rely implicitly on our own notions and feelings. Men attach an undue importance to this or that point in received opinions or practices, and cannot understand how God's blessing can be given to modes of acting to which they themselves are unaccustomed. Thus the Jews thought religion would come to an end, if the Temple were destroyed, whereas, in fact, it has spread abroad and flourished more marvellously since than ever it did before. In this perplexity of mind the Church Catholic is our divinely intended guide, which keeps us from a narrow interpretation of Scripture, from local prejudices and excitements of the day; and by its clear-sighted and consolatory teaching scatters those frightful self-formed visions which scare us.

But I have not described the extreme state of the infirmity into which the blessing of peace leads unwary Christians. They become not only over-confident of their knowledge of God's ways, but positive in their over-confidence. They do not like to be contradicted in their opinions, and are generally most attached to the very points which are most especially of their own devising.

They forget that all men are at best but learners in the school of Divine Truth, and that they themselves ought to be *ever* learning, and that they may be sure of the truth of their creed, without a like assurance in the details of religious opinion. They find it a much more comfortable view, much more agreeable to the indolence of human nature, to give over seeking, and to believe they had nothing more to find. A right faith is ever eager and on the watch, with quick eyes and ears, for tokens of God's will, whether He speak in the way of nature or of grace. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see, what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved[5]." This is that faith by which (as the prophet continues) "the just shall live." The Psalmist also expresses this expectant temper. "Unto Thee lift I up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress[6]." But as for those who have long had God's favour without cloud or storm, so it is, they grow secure. They do not feel the great gift. They are apt to presume, and so to become irreverent. The elder brother was

[5] Heb. ii. 1. [6] Ps. cxxiii. 1, 2.

too familiar with his Father. Irreverence is the very opposite temper to faith. "Son, thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine." This most gracious truth was the very cause of his murmuring. When Christians have but a little, they are thankful; they gladly pick up the crumbs from under the table. Give them much, they soon forget it is much; and when they find it is not all, and that for other men too, even penitents, God has some good in store, straightway they are offended. Without denying in words their own natural unworthiness, and still having real convictions of it to a certain point, nevertheless, somehow, they have a certain secret over-regard for themselves; at least they *act* as if they thought that the Christian privileges belonged to them over others, by a sort of fitness. And they like respect to be shown them by the world, and are jealous of any thing which is likely to interfere with the continuance of their credit and authority. Perhaps, too, they have pledged themselves to certain received opinions, and this is an additional reason for their being suspicious of what to them is a novelty. Hence such persons are least fitted to deal with difficult times. God works wondrously in the world; and at certain eras His providence puts on a new aspect. Religion seems to be failing when it is merely changing its form.

God seems for an instant to desert His own appointed instruments, and to be putting honour upon such as have been framed in express disobedience to His commands. For instance, sometimes He brings about good by means of wicked men, or seems to bless the efforts of those who have separated from His Holy Church more than those of His true labourers. Here is the trial of the Christian's faith, who, if the fact is so, must not resist it, lest haply he be found fighting against God, nor must he quarrel with it after the manner of the elder brother. But he must take every thing as God's gift, hold fast his *principles*, not give *them* up because appearances are for the moment against them, but believe all things will come round at length. On the other hand he must not cease to beg of God, and try to gain the spirit of a sound mind, the power to separate truth from falsehood, and to try the spirits, the disposition to submit to God's teaching, and the wisdom to act as the varied course of affairs requires; in a word, a portion of that Spirit which rested on the great Apostle, St. Paul.

I have thought it right to enlarge upon the conduct of the elder brother in the parable, because something of his character may perchance be found among ourselves. We have long had the inestimable blessings of peace and quiet. We

are unworthy of the least of God's mercies, much more of the greatest. But with the blessing we have the trial. Let us then guard against abusing our happy lot, while we have it, or we may lose it for having abused it. Let us guard against discontent in any shape; and as we cannot help hearing what goes on in the world, let us guard, on hearing it, against all intemperate, uncharitable feelings towards those who differ from us, or oppose us. Let us pray for our enemies; let us try to make out men to be as good as they can fairly and safely be considered; let us rejoice at any symptoms of repentance, or any marks of good principle in those who are on the side of error. Let us be forgiving. Let us try to be very humble, to understand our ignorance, and to rely constantly on the enlightening grace of our Great Teacher. Let us be "slow to speak, slow to wrath;"—not abandoning our principles, or shrinking from the avowal of them when seasonable, or going over to the cause of error, or fearing consequences, but acting ever from a sense of duty, not from passion, pride, jealousy, or an unbelieving dread of the future; feeling gently, even when we have reason to act severely. "Son, thou art ever with Me, and all that I have is thine." What a gracious announcement, if we could realize it! and how consolatory, so far as we have reason

to hope that we are following on to know God's will, and living in His faith and fear! What should alarm those who have Christ's power, or make them envious who have Christ's fulness? How ought we calmly to regard, and resolutely endure, the petty workings of an evil world, thinking seriously of nothing but of the souls that are perishing in it!

"I, even I, am He that comforteth you," says Almighty God: "who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass? and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor? I am the Lord thy God, and I have put My words in thy mouth, and have covered thee in the shadow of Mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people[7]."

[7] Isaiah li. 12—16.

SERMON VII.

OBEDIENCE THE REMEDY FOR RELIGIOUS PERPLEXITY.

PSALM xxxvii. 34.

"Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land."

THE Psalm from which I have taken my text, is written with a view of encouraging good men who are in perplexity,—and especially perplexity concerning God's designs, providence, and will. "Fret not thyself;" this is the lesson it inculcates from first to last. This world is in a state of confusion. Unworthy men prosper, and are looked on as the greatest men of the time. Truth and goodness are thrown into the shade; but wait patiently,—peace, be still; in the end, the better side shall triumph,—the meek shall inherit the earth.

Doubtless the Church is in great darkness and perplexity under the Christian dispensation, as well as under the Jewish. Not that Christianity does not explain to us the most important reli-

gious question, — which it does to our great comfort; but that, from the nature of the case, imperfect beings, as we are, must always be, on the whole, in a state of darkness. Nay, the very doctrines of the New Testament themselves bring with them their own peculiar difficulties; and, till we learn to quiet our minds, and to school them into submission to God, we shall probably find more perplexity than information even in what St. Paul calls "the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ[1]." Revelation was not given us to satisfy doubts, but to make us better men; and it is as we become better men, that it becomes light and peace to our souls; though even to the end of our lives we shall find difficulties both in it and in the world around us.

I will make some remarks to-day on the case of those who, though they are in the whole honest inquirers in religion, yet are more or less in perplexity and anxiety, and so are discouraged.

The use of difficulties to all of us in our trial in this world is obvious. Our faith is variously assailed by doubts and difficulties, in order to prove its sincerity. If we really love God and His Son, we shall go on in spite of opposition, even though, as in the case of the Canaanitish

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 4.

woman, He seem to repel us. If we are not in earnest, difficulty makes us turn back. This is one of the ways in which God separates the corn from the chaff, gradually gathering each, as time goes on, into its own heap, till the end comes, when "He will gather the wheat into His garner, but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable[2]."

Now, I am aware that to some persons it may sound strange to speak of *difficulties* in religion, for they find none at all. But though it is true, that the earlier we begin to seek God in earnest, the less of difficulty and perplexity we are likely to endure, yet this ignorance of religious difficulties in a great many cases, I fear, arises from ignorance of religion itself. When our hearts are not in our work, and we are but carried on with the stream of the world, continuing in the Church because we find ourselves there, observing religious ordinances merely because we are used to them, and professing to be Christians because others do, it is not to be expected that we should know what it is to feel ourselves wrong, and unable to get right,—to feel doubt, anxiety, disappointment, discontent; whereas, when our minds are awakened, and we see that there is a right

[2] Luke iii. 17.

way and a wrong way, and that we have much to learn, when we try to gain religious knowledge from Scripture, and to apply it to ourselves, then from time to time we are troubled with doubts and misgivings, and are oppressed with gloom.

To all those who are perplexed in any way soever, who wish for light but cannot find it, one precept must be given,—*obey*. It is obedience which brings a man into the right path; it is obedience keeps him there and strengthens him in it. Under all circumstances, whatever be the cause of his distress,—obey. In the words of the text, "Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee."

Let us apply this exhortation to the case of those who have but lately taken up the subject of religion at all. Every science has its difficulties at first, why then should the science of living well be without them? When the subject of religion is new to us, it is strange. We have heard truths all our lives without feeling them duly; at length, when they affect us, we cannot believe them to be the same we have long known. We are thrown out of our fixed notions of things; an embarrassment ensues; a general painful uncertainty. We say, "Is the Bible true? Is it possible?" and are distressed by evil doubts, which we can hardly explain to ourselves, much less to others. No one

can help us. And the relative importance of present objects is so altered from what it was, that we can scarcely form any judgment upon them, or when we attempt it, we form a wrong judgment. Our eyes do not accommodate themselves to the various distances of the objects before us, and are dazzled; or like the blind man restored to sight, we "see men as trees walking[3]." Moreover, our judgment of persons, as well as of things, is changed; and, if not every where changed, yet at first every where suspected by ourselves. And this general distrust of ourselves is the greater, the longer we have been already living in inattention to sacred subjects, and the more we now are humbled and ashamed of ourselves. And it leads us to take up with the first religious guide who offers himself to us, whatever be his real fitness for the office.

To these agitations of mind about what is truth, and what is error, is added an anxiety about ourselves, which, however sincere, is apt to lead us wrong. We do not feel, think, and act as religiously as we could wish; and while we are sorry for it, we are also (perhaps) somewhat *surprised* at it, and impatient at it,—which is natural but unreasonable. Instead of reflecting that we are

[3] Mark viii. 24.

just setting about our recovery from a most serious disease of long standing, we conceive we ought to be able to trace the course of our recovery by a sensible improvement. This same impatience is seen in persons who are recovering from bodily indisposition. They gain strength slowly, and are better perhaps for some days, and then worse again; and a slight relapse dispirits them. In the same way, when we begin to seek God in earnest, we are apt, not only to be humbled, (which we ought to be,) but, to be discouraged at the slowness with which we are able to amend, in spite of all the assistances of God's grace. Forgetting that our proper title at very best is that of penitent sinners, we seek to rise all at once into the blessedness of the sons of God. This impatience leads us to misuse the purpose of self-examination; which is principally intended to inform us of our sins, whereas we are disappointed if it does not at once tell us of our improvement. Doubtless, in a length of time we shall be conscious of improvement too, but the object of ordinary self-examination is to find out whether we are in earnest, and again, what we have done wrong, in order that we may pray for pardon, and do better. Further, reading in Scripture how exalted the thoughts and spirit of Christians should be, we are apt to forget that a Christian spirit

is the growth of time; and that we cannot force it upon our minds, however desirable and necessary it may be to possess it; that by giving utterance to religious sentiments we do not become religious, rather the reverse; whereas, if we strove to obey God's will in all things, we actually should be gradually training our hearts into the fulness of a Christian spirit. But, not understanding this, men are led to speak much and expressly upon sacred subjects, as if it were a duty to do so, and in the hope of its making them better; and they measure their advance in faith and holiness, not by their power of obeying God in practice, mastering their will, and becoming more exact in their daily duties, but by the warmth and energy of their religious feelings. And, when they cannot sustain these to that height which they consider almost the characteristic of a true Christian, then they are discouraged, and tempted to despair. Added to this, sometimes their old sins, reviving from the slumber into which they have been cast for a time, rush over their minds, and seem prepared to take them captive. They cry to God for aid, but He seems not to hear them, and they know not which way to look for safety.

Now such persons must be reminded first of all, of the greatness of the work which they have undertaken, viz. the sanctification of their souls.

Those, indeed, who think this an easy task, or (which comes to the same thing) who think that, though hard in itself, it will be easy to them, for God's grace will take all the toil of it from them, such men of course must be disappointed on finding by experience the force of their original evil nature, and the extreme slowness with which even a Christian is able to improve it. And it is to be feared, that this disappointment in some cases issues in a belief, that it is *impossible* to overcome our evil selves; that bad we are, bad we must be; that our innate corruption lies like a load in our hearts, and no more admits of improvement than a stone does of light and thought; and, in consequence, that all we have to do, is to believe in Christ who is to save us, and to dwell on the thoughts of his perfect work for us,—that this is all we can do,—and that it is presumption as well as folly to attempt more.

But what says the text? "Wait on the Lord and keep his way." And Isaiah? "They that wait upon the Lord shall *renew* their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint[4]." And St. Paul? "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me[5]."

[4] Is. xl. 31. [5] Phil. iv. 13.

The very fruit of Christ's passion was the gift of the Holy Spirit, which was to enable us to do what otherwise we could not do—"*to work out our own salvation*[6]."—Yet, while we must aim at this, and feel convinced of our ability to do it at length through the gifts bestowed on us, we cannot do it rightly without a deep settled conviction of the exceeding difficulty of the work. That is, not only shall we be tempted to negligence, but to impatience also, and thence into all kinds of unlawful treatments of the soul, if we be possessed by a notion that religious discipline soon becomes easy to the believer, and that the heart is speedily changed. Christ's "yoke is easy[7]:" true, to those who are accustomed to it, not to the unbroken neck. "Wisdom is very unpleasant to the unlearned, (says the son of Sirach,) he that is without understanding will not remain with her." "At the first she will walk with him by crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline, until she may trust his soul and try him by her laws. Then will she return the straight way unto him, and comfort him, and show him her secrets[8]."

Let, then, every beginner make up his mind to suffer disquiet and perplexity. He cannot com-

[6] Phil. ii. 12. [7] Matt. xi. 30.

[8] Ecclus. vi. 20; iv. 17, 18.

plain that it should be so; and though he should be deeply ashamed of himself that it is so, (for had he followed God from a child, his condition would have been far different, though, then, perhaps, not without some perplexities,) still he has no cause to be surprised or discouraged. The more he makes up his mind manfully to bear doubt, struggle against it, and meekly to do God's will all through it, the sooner this unsettled state of mind will cease, and order will rise out of confusion. "Wait on the Lord," this is the rule; "keep His way," this is the manner of waiting. Go about your duty; mind little things as well as great. Do not pause, and say, "I am as I was; day after day passes, and still no light;" go on. It is very painful to be haunted by wandering doubts, to have thoughts shoot across the mind about the reality of religion altogether, or of this or that particular doctrine of it, or about the correctness of one's own faith, and the safety of one's own state. But it must be right to serve God; we have a voice within us answering to the injunction in the text, of waiting on Him, and keeping His way. David confesses it. "When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek[9]."—And

[9] Psalm xxvii. 8.

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surely such obedient waiting upon Him will obtain His blessing. "*Blessed* are they that keep His commandments." And besides this express promise, even if we had to seek for a way to understand His perfect will, could we conceive one of greater promise than that of beginning with little things, and so gradually making progress? In all other things is not this the way to perfection? Does not a child learn to walk short distances at first? Who would attempt to bear great weights before he had succeeded with the lesser? It is from God's great goodness that our daily constant duty is placed in the performance of small and comparatively easy services. To be dutiful and obedient in ordinary matters, to speak the truth, to be honest, to be sober, to keep from sinful words and thoughts, to be kind and forgiving,—and all this for our Saviour's sake,—let us attempt *these* duties first. *They* even will be difficult,—the least of them; still they are much easier than the solution of the doubts which harass us, and they will by degrees give us a practical knowledge of the Truth.

To take one instance, out of many which might be given: suppose we have any perplexing indescribable doubts about the Divine power of our Blessed Lord, or concerning the doctrine of the Trinity; well, let us leave the subject, and turn

to do God's will. If we do this in faith and humility, we shall in time find that, while we have been obeying our Saviour's precepts, and imitating His conduct in the Gospels, our difficulties have been removed, though it may take time to remove them; and though we are not, during the time, sensible of what is going on. There may, indeed, be cases in which they are never removed entirely,—and in which doubtless some great and good object is secured by the trial; but we may fairly and safely look out for a more comfortable issue. And so as regards all our difficulties. "Wait on the Lord, and keep His way." His word is sure; we may safely trust it. We shall gain light as to general doctrines, by embodying them in those particular instances in which they become ordinary duties.

But it too often happens, that from one cause or other men do not pursue this simple method of gradually extricating themselves from error.—They seek some new path which promises to be shorter and easier than the lowly and the circuitous way of obedience. They wish to arrive at the heights of Mount Zion without winding round its base; and at first (it must be confessed) they seem to make greater progress than those who are content to wait, and work righteousness. Impatient of "sitting in darkness, and having no

light," and of completing the prophet's picture of a saint in trouble, "by fearing the Lord, and obeying the voice of His servant [1]," they expect to gain speedy peace and holiness by means of new teachers, and by a new doctrine.

Many are misled by confidence in themselves. They look back at the first seasons of their repentance and conversion, as if the time of their greatest knowledge; and instead of considering that their earliest religious notions were probably the most confused and mixed with error, and therefore endeavouring to separate the good from the bad, they consecrate all they then felt as a standard of doctrine to which they are bound to appeal; and as to the opinions of others, they think little of it, for religion being a new subject to themselves, they are easily led to think it must be a new and untried subject to others also, especially, since the best men are often the least willing to converse, except in private, on religious subjects, and still more averse to speak of them to those who they think will not value them rightly.

But, leaving the mention of those who err from self-confidence, I would rather lament over such as are led away from the path of plain simple obedience by a compliance with the views and

[1] Isaiah l. 10.

wishes of those around them. Such persons there are all through the Church, and ever have been. Such perhaps have been many Christians in the communion of the Church of Rome; who, feeling deeply the necessity of a religious life, yet strive by means different from those which God has blessed, to gain His favour. They begin religion at the very end of it, and make those observances and rules the chief means of pleasing Him, which in fact should be but the spontaneous acts of the formed Christian temper. And others among ourselves are bound by a similar yoke of bondage, though it be more speciously disguised, when they subject their minds to certain unscriptural rules, and fancy they must separate in some self-devised way from the world, and that they must speak and act according to some arbitrary and novel form of doctrine, which they try to set before themselves, instead of endeavouring to imbue their hearts with that free, unconstrained spirit of devotion, which lowly obedience in ordinary matters would imperceptibly form within them. How many are there, more or less such, who love the Truth, and would fain do God's will, who yet are led aside, and walk in bondage, while they are promised superior light and freedom! They desire to be living members of the Church, and they anxiously seek out what-

ever they can admire in the true sons of the Church; but they feel forced to measure every thing by a certain superstitious standard which they revere,—they are frightened at shadows,—and thus they are, from time to time, embarrassed and perplexed, whenever, that is, they cannot reconcile the conduct and lives of those who are really, and whom they wish to believe eminent Christians, with that false religious system which they have adopted.

Before concluding, I must notice one other state of mind in which the precept of "waiting on God and keeping His way," will avail, above all others, to lead right a doubting and perplexed mind.

It sometimes happens, from ill health or other cause, that persons fall into religious despondency. They fancy that they have so abused God's mercy that there is no hope for them; that once they knew the Truth, but that now it is withdrawn from them; that they have had warnings which they have neglected, and now they are left by the Holy Spirit, and given over to Satan. Then, they recollect divers passages of Scripture, which speak of the peril of falling away, and they apply these to their own case. Now I speak of such instances, only so far as they can be called ailments of the mind,—for

often they must be treated as ailments of the body. As far as they are mental, let us observe how it will conduce to restore the quiet of the mind, to attend to the humble ordinary duties of our station, that walking in God's way, of which the text speaks. Sometimes, indeed, persons thus afflicted, increase their disorder by attempting to console themselves by those elevated Christian doctrines which St. Paul enlarges on; and others encourage them in it. But St. Paul's doctrine is not intended for weak and unstable minds[2]. He says himself: "We speak wisdom among them that *are perfect*;" not to those who are (what he calls) "babes in Christ[3]." In proportion as we gain strength, we shall be able to understand and profit by the full promises of the Christian covenant; but those who are confused, agitated, restless in their minds, who busy themselves with many thoughts, and are overwhelmed with conflicting feelings, such persons are, in general, made more restless and more unhappy, (as the experience of sick beds may show us,) by holding out to them doctrines and assurances which they cannot rightly apprehend. Now, not to speak of that peculiar blessing which is promised to obedience to God's will, let us observe

[2] 2 Pet. iii. 16. [3] 1 Cor. ii. 6. iii. 1.

how well it is calculated, by its natural effect, to soothe and calm the mind. When we set about to obey God, in the ordinary businesses of daily life, we are at once interested by realities which withdraw our minds from vague fears and uncertain indefinite surmises about the future. Without laying aside the thoughts of Christ, (the contrary,) still we learn to view Him in His tranquil providence, before we set about contemplating His greater works, and we are saved from taking an unchristian thought for the morrow, while we are busied in present services. Thus our Saviour gradually discloses Himself to the troubled mind; not as He is in heaven, as when He struck down Saul to the ground, but as He was in the days of His flesh, eating and conversing among His brethren, and bidding us, in imitation of Him, think no duty beneath the notice of those who sincerely wish to please God.

Such afflicted inquirers, then, after truth, must be exhorted to keep a guard upon their feelings, and to control their hearts. They say they are terrified lest they should be past hope; and they will not be persuaded that God is all-merciful, in spite of all the Scriptures say to that effect. Well, then, I would take them on their own ground. Supposing their state to be as wretched as is conceivable, can they deny it is their duty

now to serve God? Can they do better than try to serve Him? Job said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him[4]." They say they do not *wish* to serve God,—that they want a heart to serve Him. Let us grant, (if they will have it so,) that they are most obdurate; still they are alive,—they must be doing something, and can they do ought better than try to quiet themselves, and be resigned, and to do right rather than wrong, even though they are persuaded that it does not come from their heart, and is not acceptable to God? They say they dare not ask for God's grace to assist them. This is doubtless a miserable state: still, since they must act in some way, though they cannot do what is really good without His grace, yet, at least, let them do what seems like truth and goodness. Nay, though it is shocking to set before their minds such a prospect, yet even were they already in the place of punishment, will they not confess, it would be the best thing they could do, to commit then as little sin as possible? Much more then *now*, when even if they have no hope, their heart at least is not so entirely hardened as it will be then.

It must not be for an instant supposed I am admitting the possibility of a person being re-

[4] Job xiii. 15.

jected by God, who has any such right feelings in his mind. The anxiety of the sufferers I have been describing, shows they are still under the influence of Divine grace, though they will not allow it; but I say this, to give another instance in which a determination to obey God's will strictly in ordinary matters tends, through His blessing, to calm and comfort the mind, and to bring it out of perplexity into the clear day.

And so in various other cases which might be recounted. Whatever our difficulty be, this is plain. "Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shalt exalt thee." Or in our Saviour's words: "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me, shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." "Whosoever shall do and teach these least commandments, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance[5]."

[5] John xiv. 21. Matt. v. 19. xiii. 12.

SERMON VIII.

FAITH AND OBEDIENCE.

MATTHEW xix. 17.

"If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

LET a plain man read the Gospels with a serious and humble mind, and as in God's presence, and I suppose he would be in no perplexity at all about the meaning of these words. They are clear as the day at first reading, and the rest of our Saviour's teaching does but corroborate their obvious meaning. I conceive that if such a man, after reading them and the other similar passages which occur in the Gospels, were told that he had not mastered the sense of them, and that in matter of fact to attempt to enter into life by keeping the commandments, to attempt to keep the commandments in order to enter into life, were suspicious and dangerous modes of expression, and that the use of them showed an ignorance of the real spirit of Christ's doctrine, he would in

despair say, "then truly Scripture is not a book for the multitude, but for those only who have educated and refined understandings, so as to see things in a sense different from their obvious meaning."

Or again, supposing one, who disbelieved our Lord's divinity, fell in with persons who did thus consider that to keep the commandments by way of entering into life, was a sign of spiritual blindness in a man, not to say of pride and reprobation; do you suppose there would be any possibility of their silencing him as regards his own particular heresy, with Scripture proofs of the sacred truth which he denied? For can the doctrine that Christ is God, be more clearly enunciated than the precept that, to enter into life, we must keep the commandments? and is it not the way to make men think that Scripture has no definite meaning at all, and that each man may fairly put his own sense upon it, when they see our Lord's plain directions thus explained away?

The occasion of this unreal interpretation of Scripture, which in fact does exist among us to a great extent, is, that St. Paul, in some passages of his Epistles, teaches us that we are accepted and saved by faith: and it is argued that, since he wrote under the guidance of the promised Spirit, his is the true gospel mode of Speech, and that

the language of Christ, the eternal Word of God, must be drawn aside, however violently, into that certain meaning which is assumed as the only true sense of St. Paul. *How* our Divine Master's words are explained away, what ingenious refinements are used to deprive us of the plain and solemn sense which they bear on their very front, it profits not here to inquire; still no one, it may be presumed, can deny, that, whether rightly or wrongly, they *are* turned aside in a very unexpected way, unless rather they are put out of sight altogether, and forgotten, as if superseded by the Apostolic Epistles. Doubtless those Epistles are inspired by the Holy Spirit: but He was sent from Christ to glorify and illuminate the words of Christ. The two heavenly Witnesses cannot speak diversely; faith will listen to them both. Surely our duty is, neither to resist the One nor the Other; but humbly to consider whether there is not some one substantial doctrine which they teach in common; and that with God's blessing I will now attempt to do.

How are we sinners to be accepted by Almighty God? Doubtless the sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the *meritorious cause* of our justification, and His Church is the *ordained instrument* of conveying it to us. But our present question relates to another subject, to *our own part* in appropri-

ating it; and here I say Scripture makes two answers, saying sometimes "Believe, and you shall be saved," and sometimes "Keep the commandments, and you shall be saved." Let us consider whether these two modes of speech are not reconcileable with each other.

What is meant by faith? it is to feel in good earnest that we are creatures of God; it is a practical perception of the unseen world; it is to understand that this world is not enough for our happiness, to look beyond it on towards God, to realize His presence, to wait upon Him, to endeavour to learn and to do His will, and to seek our good from Him. It is not a mere temporary strong act or impetuous feeling of the mind, an impression or a view coming upon it, but it is a *habit*, a state of mind, lasting and consistent. To have faith in God is to surrender oneself to God, humbly to put one's interests, or to wish to be allowed to put them, into His hands who is the Sovereign Giver of all good.

Now, again, let me ask, what is obedience? it is the obvious mode, suggested by nature, of a creature's conducting himself in God's sight, who fears Him as his Maker, and knows that, as a sinner, he has especial cause for fearing Him. Under such circumstances he "will do what he can" to please Him, as the woman whom our

Lord commended. He will look every way to see how it is possible to approve himself to Him, and will rejoice to find any service which may stand as a sort of proof that he is in earnest. And he will find nothing better as an offering, or as an evidence, than obedience to that Holy Law, which conscience tells him has been given us by God Himself; that is, he will be diligent in doing all his duty as far as he knows it and can do it.—Thus, as is evident, the two states of mind are altogether one and the same; it is quite indifferent whether we say a man seeks God in faith, or say he seeks Him by obedience; and whereas Almighty God has graciously declared He will receive and bless all that seek Him, it is quite indifferent whether we say, He accepts those who *believe*, or those who *obey*. To believe is to look beyond this world to God, and to obey is to look beyond this world to God; to believe is of the heart, and to obey is of the heart; to believe is not a solitary act, but a consistent habit of trust; and to obey is not a solitary act, but a consistent habit of doing our duty in all things. I do not say that faith and obedience do not stand for separate ideas in our minds, but they stand for nothing more; they are not divided one from the other in fact. They are but one thing viewed differently.

If it be said that a man may keep from sin and

do good without thinking of God, and therefore without being religious or having faith; this is true, but nothing to the purpose. It is, alas! too true that men often do what is in itself right, not from the thought of God, but for some purpose of this world; and all of us have our best doings sullied by the intrusion of bad thoughts and motives. But all this, I say, is nothing to our present purpose; for if a man does right, *not* for religion's sake but the world's sake, though he happens to be doing right, that is, to perform outwardly good actions, this is in no sense *obedience*, which is of the *heart*. And it was obedience, not mere outward good conduct, which I said belonged to the same temper of mind as faith. And I repeat it, for by obedience is meant obedience, not to the world, but to God,—and habitually to obey God, is to be constant in looking on to God,—and to look on to Almighty God, is to have faith; so that to "live by faith," or "walk by faith," (according to the Scripture phrases,) that is, to have a habit of faith, and to be obedient, are one and the same general character of mind;—viewed as sitting at Jesus' feet, it is called *faith*; viewed as running to do His will, it is called *obedience*.

If again it be said that a man may be obedient and yet proud of being so, that is, obedient with-

out having faith, I would maintain on the other hand, that in matter of fact a man is proud, or (what is sometimes called) self-righteous, not when obedient, but in proportion to his disobedience. To be proud, is to rest on oneself, which they are most chargeable with who do least; but a really obedient mind is necessarily dissatisfied with itself, and looks out of itself for help, from understanding the greatness of its task; in other words, in proportion as a man obeys, is he driven to faith, in order to learn the remedy of the imperfections of his obedience.

All this is clear and obvious to every thinking man; and this view of the subject was surely present to the minds of the inspired writers of Scripture,—for this reason, because they use the two words, faith and obedience, indiscriminately, sometimes declaring we shall be accepted, saved by *believing*, sometimes by *doing our duty*. And they so interchange these two conditions of God's favour, so quickly pass to and fro from the one view to the other, as to show that in truth the two do not differ, except in idea. If these apparently *two* conditions were merely connected, not substantially one, surely the inspired writers would compare them one with the other,—surely they would be consistent in appropriating distinct offices to each. But, in very truth, from the beginning

to the end of Scripture, the one voice of inspiration consistently maintains, not an uniform contrast between faith and obedience, but this *one* doctrine, that the only way of salvation open to us is the *surrender* of ourselves to our Maker in all things, supreme devotion, dedication, the turning with all our heart to God; and this state of mind is ascribed in Scripture sometimes to the believing, sometimes to the obedient, according to the particular passage; and it is no matter to which it is ascribed.

Now I will cite some passages from Scripture in proof of what I have said. The Psalmist says, "Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lift up his soul unto vanity nor sworn deceitfully[1]." Here, *obedience* is described as securing a man's salvation. But in another Psalm we read, "How great is thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that *trust in Thee*[2]." Here, trust or faith is the condition of God's favour. Again, in other Psalms, first, "What man is he that desireth life? Keep

[1] Ps. xv. 1, 2. xxiv. 4.

[2] Ps. xxxi. 19. xxxiv. 12—14. 18. 22.

thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile. *Depart from evil and do good,* seek peace and pursue it." . . . Next it is said, "the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a *broken heart,* and saveth such as be of a *contrite spirit.*" Lastly, "None of them that *trust in* Him shall be desolate." Here, obedience, repentance, and faith are successively mentioned as the means of obtaining God's favour; and why all of them, but because they are all names for one and the same substantial character, only viewed on different sides of it, that one character of mind which is pleasing and acceptable to Almighty God? Again, the prophet Isaiah says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee[3]." Yet in the preceding verse he had proclaimed, "Open ye the gates (of the heavenly city), that the righteous nation, which keepeth the Truth, may enter in." In like manner Solomon says, "By *mercy and truth* iniquity is purged:" Daniel, that "*mercy to the poor*" is a "breaking off of sin," and "an healing of error;" Nehemiah prays God to "remember him," and "not wipe out his *good deeds for the House of his God;*" yet Habakkuk says, the "just shall live by his *faith*[4]."

[3] Isaiah xxvi. 2, 3.

[4] Prov. xvi. 6. Dan. iv. 27. Neh. xiii. 14. Hab. ii. 4.

What honour our Saviour put on faith I need hardly remind you. He blessed Peter's confession, and in prospect those who, though they saw Him not on earth, as Thomas, yet believe; and, in His miracles of mercy, *faith* was the condition He exacted for the exertion of His powers of healing and restoration. On one occasion he says, "*All things* are possible to him that *believeth*[5]." Yet afterwards in His solemn account of the last judgment, He tells us that it is *obedience to His will* which will then receive His blessing, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me[6]." Again, the Angel said to Cornelius, "Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God;" and Cornelius is described as "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway[7]." Yet it is in the very same Book of Acts that we read St. Paul's words, "*Believe*, and thou shalt be saved[8]." The Epistles afford us still more striking instances of the intimate association existing in the Apostle's thoughts between believing and obeying, as though exhibitions of one and the same spiritual character of mind. For instance, St. Paul says Abraham was accepted

[5] Mark ix. 23.
[6] Matt. xxv. 40.
[7] Acts x. 2.
[8] Acts xvi. 31.

(not by ceremonial observances, but) by *faith*, yet St. James says he was accepted by works of *obedience*. The meaning is clear, that Abraham found favour in God's sight, *because he gave himself* up to Him; this is faith or obedience, whichever we please to call it. No matter whether we say, Abraham was favoured because his faith embraced God's *promises*, or because his obedience cherished God's *commands*, for God's commands are promises, and His promises commands to a heart devoted to Him; so that, as there is no substantial difference between command and promise, so there is likewise none between obedience and faith. Perhaps it is scarcely correct even to say, that faith comes first and obedience follows as an inseparable second step, and that faith as being the first step, is accepted. For not a single act of faith can be named but what has in it the nature of obedience, that is, implies the making an effort and a consequent victory. What is the faith which earns Baptism, the very faith which appropriates the free gift of grace, but an acquiescence of the reason in the Gospel Mysteries? Even the thief upon the Cross had (it would seem) to rule his reason, to struggle against sight, and to bring under pride and obstinacy, when he turned to Him as his Saviour, who seemed to mortal eyes only his fellow-sufferer. A mere confession or

prayer, which might not be really an act of obedience in us, might be such in him. On the other hand, faith does not cease with the first act, but continues. It works with obedience. In proportion as a man believes, so he obeys; they come together, and grow together, and last through life. Neither are perfect; both are on the same level of imperfection; they keep pace with each other; in proportion to the imperfection of one so is the imperfection of the other; and as the one advances, so does the other also.

And now I have described the temper of mind which has, in every age, been acceptable to Almighty God, in its two aspects of faith and obedience. In every age "the righteous shall live by faith." And it is remarkable that these words of the prophet Habakkuk, which St. Paul quotes three several times to show the identity of true religion under all dispensations, do also represent it under these very true characteristics, Righteousness and Faith.

Before closing the subject, however, it may be necessary, in a few words, to explain *why* it is that, in some parts of St. Paul's Epistles, a certain stress is laid upon faith over and above the other parts of a religious character, in our justification. The reason seems to be as follows: the Gospel being pre-eminently a covenant of grace, faith is

so far of more excellence than other virtues, because it confesses this beyond all others. Works of obedience witness to God's just claims upon us, not to His mercy: but faith comes empty-handed, hides even its own worth, and does but point at that precious scheme of redemption which God's love has devised for sinners. Hence, it is the frame of mind especially suitable to us, and is said, in a special way, to justify us, because it glorifies God, witnessing that He accepts those, and those only, who confess they are not worthy to be accepted.

On this account, faith has a certain prerogative of dignity under the Gospel. At the same time we must never forget that the more usual mode of doctrine both with Christ and His Apostles, is to refer our acceptance to obedience to the commandments, not to faith; and this, as it would appear, from a merciful anxiety in their teaching, lest, in contemplating God's grace, we should forget our own duties.

To conclude. If, after all, to believe and to obey be but different characteristics of one and the same state of mind, in what a most serious error are whole masses of men involved at this day, who are commonly considered religious? It is undeniable that there are multitudes who would avow with confidence and exultation that they put

obedience only in the second place in their religious scheme, as if it were rather a necessary consequence of faith than requiring a direct attention for its own sake; a something subordinate to it, rather than connatural and contemporaneous with it. It is certain, however startling it is to reflect upon it, that numbers do not in any true sense believe that they shall be judged; they believe in a coming judgment as regards the wicked, but they do not believe that all men, that they themselves personally, will undergo it. I wish from my heart that the persons in question could be persuaded to read Scripture with their own eyes, and take it in a plain and natural way, instead of perplexing themselves with their human systems, and measuring and arranging its inspired declarations by an artificial rule. Are they quite sure that in the next world they will be able to remember these strained interpretations in their greatest need? Then surely, while we wait for the judgment, the luminous sentences of Divine Truth will come over us, first one and then another, and we shall wonder how we ever misunderstood them! Then will they confront us in their simplicity and entireness, and we shall understand that nothing can be added to them, nothing taken away. Then at length, if not before, we shall comprehend our Lord's assurance, that, "He will

reward every man according to his works;" St. Paul's, that "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad;" St. Peter's that "he is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead;" St. James's, that "a man is justified by works and not by faith only;" and St. John's, that "they are blessed that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city[9]." Whatever else may be true, these declarations, so solemnly, so repeatedly made, must hold good in their plain and obvious sense, and may not be infringed or superseded. So many testimonies combined are "an anchor of the soul, sure and stedfast," and if they mean something else than what they all say, what part of Scripture can we dare trust in future as a guide and consolation?

"O Lord, Thy Word endureth for ever in heaven!" but the expositions of men are written on the sea-shore, and are blotted out before the evening.

[9] Matt. xvi. 27. 2 Cor. v. 10. Acts x. 42. James ii. 24. Rev. xxii. 14.

SERMON IX.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL WITHOUT OBEDIENCE.

JOHN xiii. 17.

"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

THERE never was a people or an age to which these words could be more suitably addressed than to this country at this time; because we know more of the way to serve God, of our duties, our privileges, and our reward, than any other people hitherto, as far as we have the means of judging. To us then especially our Saviour says, "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

Now, doubtless, many of us think we know this very well. It seems a very trite thing to say, that it is nothing to *know* what is right, unless we *do* it; an old subject about which nothing new can be said. When we read such passages in Scripture, we pass over them as admitting them without dispute; and thus we contrive practi-

cally to forget them. Knowledge is nothing compared with doing; but the *knowing* that knowledge is nothing, we make to be *something*, we make it count, and thus we cheat ourselves.

This we do in parallel cases also. Many a man instead of *learning* humility in practice, confesses himself a poor sinner, and next *prides* himself upon the confession; he ascribes the glory of his redemption to God, and then becomes in a manner *proud* that he is redeemed. He is proud of his so called humility.

Doubtless Christ spoke no words in vain. The Eternal Wisdom of God did not utter His voice that we might at once catch up His words in an irreverent manner, think we understand them at a glance, and pass them over. But His word endureth for ever; it has a depth of meaning suited to all times and places, and hardly and painfully to be understood in any. They, who think they enter into it easily, may be quite sure they do not enter into it at all.

Now then let us try, by His grace, to make the text a living word to the benefit of our souls. Our Lord says, "If ye know, happy are ye if ye do." Let us consider *how* we commonly read Scripture.

We read a passage in the Gospels, for instance, a parable perhaps, or the account of a miracle;

or we read a chapter in the prophets, or a psalm. Who is not struck with the beauty of what he reads? I do not wish to speak of those who read the Bible only now and then, and who will in consequence generally find its sacred pages dull and uninteresting; but of those who study it. Who of such persons does not see the beauty of it? for instance, take the passage which introduces the text. Christ had been washing His disciples' feet. He did so at a season of great mental suffering; it was just before He was seized by His enemies to be put to death. The traitor, His familiar friend, was in the room. All of His disciples, even the most devoted of them, loved Him much less than they thought they did. In a little while they were all to forsake Him and flee. This He foresaw; yet He calmly washed their feet, and then He told them that He did so by way of an example; that they should be full of lowly services one to the other, as He to them; that he among them was in fact the highest who put himself the lowest. This He had said before; and His disciples must have recollected it. Perhaps they might wonder in their secret hearts *why* He repeated the lesson; they might say to themselves, "We have heard this before." They might be surprised that His significant action, His washing their feet, issued in nothing else than a precept already

delivered, the command to be humble. At the same time they would not be able to deny, or rather they would deeply feel, the beauty of His action. Nay, as loving Him (after all,) above all things, and reverencing Him as their Lord and Teacher, they would feel an admiration and awe of Him; but their minds would not rest sufficiently on the *practical* direction of the instruction vouchsafed to them. They knew the truth, and they admired it; they did not observe what it was they lacked. Such may be considered their frame of mind; and hence the force of the text, delivered primarily against Judas Iscariot, who knew and sinned deliberately against the truth; secondarily referring to all the Apostles, and St. Peter chiefly, who promised to be faithful, but failed under the trial; lastly, to us all,—all of us here assembled, who hear the word of life continually, know it, admire it, do all but obey it.

Is it not so? is not Scripture altogether pleasant except in its strictness? do not we try to persuade ourselves, that to *feel* religiously, to confess our love of religion, and to be able to talk of religion, will stand in the place of careful obedience, of that *self-denial* which is the very substance of true practical religion? Alas! that religion which is so delightful as a vision, should be so distasteful as a reality. Yet so it is, whether we are aware of the fact or not.

1. The multitude of persons even who profess religion are in this state of mind. We will take the case of those who are in better circumstances than the mass of the community. They are well educated and taught; they have few distresses in life, or are able to get over them by the variety of their occupations, by the spirits which attend good health, or at least by the lapse of time. They go on respectably and happily, with the same general tastes and habits which they would have had if the Gospel had not been given them. They have an eye to what the world thinks of them; are charitable when it is expected. They are polished in their manners, kind from natural disposition or a feeling of propriety. Thus their religion is based upon self and the world, a mere *civilization;* the same (I say,) as it would have been in the main, (taking the state of society as they find it,) even supposing Christianity were not the religion of the land. But it is; and let us go on to ask, how do they in consequence feel towards it? They accept it, they add it to what they *are,* they ingraft it upon the selfish and worldly habits of an unrenewed heart. They have been taught to revere it, and to believe it to come from God; so they admire it, and accept it as a rule of life, so far forth as it agrees with the carnal principles which govern them. So far as it does *not* agree,

they are blind to its excellence and its claims. They overlook or explain away its precepts. They in no sense obey *because* it commands. They do right where they *would* have done right had it not commanded; however, they speak well of it, and think they understand it. Sometimes, if I may continue the description, they adopt it into a certain refined elegance of sentiments and manners, and then their religion is all that is graceful, fastidious, and luxurious. They love religious poetry and eloquent preaching. They desire to have their feelings roused and soothed, and to secure a variety and relief of that eternal subject which is unchangeable. They tire of its simplicity, and perhaps seek to keep up their interest in it by means of religious narratives, fictitious or embellished, or of news from foreign countries, or of the history of the prospects or successes of the Gospel; thus perverting what is in itself good and innocent. This is their state of mind at best; for more commonly they think it enough merely to show some slight regard to the subject of religion; to attend its services on the Lord's day, and then only once, and coldly to express an approbation of it. But of course every description of such persons can be but general; for the shades of character are so varied and blended in individuals, as to make it impossible to give an

accurate picture, and often very estimable persons and truly good Christians are partly infected with this bad and earthly spirit.

2. Take again another description of them. They have perhaps turned their attention to the means of promoting the happiness of their fellow-creatures, and have formed a system of morality and religion of their own; then they come to Scripture. They are much struck with the high tone of its precepts, and the beauty of its teaching. It is true, they find many things in it which they do not understand or do not approve; many things they would not have said themselves. But they pass these by; they fancy that these do not apply to the present day, (which is an easy way of removing any thing we do not like,) and *on the whole* they receive the Bible, and they think it highly serviceable for the lower classes. Therefore, they recommend it, and support the institutions which are the channels of teaching it. But as to their own case, it never comes into their minds to apply its precepts seriously to themselves; they *know* them already, they consider. They *know* them and that is enough; but as for *doing* them, by which I mean, going forward to obey them with an unaffected earnestness and an honest faith *acting upon* them, receiving them as they are, and not as their own previously formed opinions

would have them be, they have nothing of this right spirit. They do not contemplate such a mode of acting. To recommend and affect a moral and decent conduct, (on *whatever* principles,) seems to them to be enough. The spread of knowledge bringing in its train a selfish temperance, a selfish peaceableness, a selfish benevolence, the morality of expedience, this satisfies them. They care for none of the truths of Scripture, *on the ground* of their being in Scripture; these scarcely become more valuable in their eyes for being there written. They do not obey *because* they are told to obey, on faith; and the need of this divine principle of conduct they do not comprehend. Why will it not answer (they seem to say,) to make men good in one way as well as another? "Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, are they not better than all the waters of Israel?" as if all the knowledge and the training that books ever gave had power to unloose one sinner from the bonds of Satan, or to effect more than an outward reformation, an *appearance* of obedience; as if it were not a far different principle, a principle independent of knowledge, above it and before it, which leads to *real* obedience, that principle of divine faith, given from above, which has life in itself, and has power really to use knowledge to the

soul's welfare; in the hand of which knowledge is (as it were) the torch lighting us on our way, but not teaching or strengthening us to walk.

3. Or take another view of the subject. Is it not one of the most common excuses made by the poor for being irreligious, that they have had no education? as if to know much was a necessary step for right practice. Again, they are apt to think it *enough* to know and to talk of religion, to make a man religious. Why have you come hither to-day, my brethren?—not as a matter of course, I will hope; not merely because friends or superiors told you to come. I will suppose you have come to church *as a religious act;* but beware of supposing that all is done and over by the act of coming. It is not enough to be *present* here; though many men act as if they forgot they must attend to what is going on, as well as come. It is not enough to listen to what is preached; though many think they have gone a great way when they do this. You *must pray;* now this is very hard in itself to any one who tries (and this is the reason why so many men prefer the sermon to the prayers, because the former is merely the getting *knowledge,* and the latter is to do a *deed* of obedience): you must *pray;* and this I say is very difficult, because our thoughts are so apt to wander. But even this is not all;—you must, as

you pray, really intend to *try to practise* what you pray for. When you say, "Lead us not into temptation," you must in good earnest mean to avoid in your daily conduct those temptations which you have already suffered from. When you say, "Deliver us from evil," you must mean to struggle against that evil in your hearts, which you are conscious of, and which you pray to be forgiven. This is difficult; still more is behind. You must actually carry your good intentions into effect during the week, and in truth and reality war against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And any one here present who falls short of this, that is, who thinks it enough to come to church to *learn* God's will, but does not bear in mind to do it in his daily conduct, be he high or be he low, know he mysteries and all knowledge, or be he unlettered and busily occupied in active life, he is a fool in His sight, who maketh the wisdom of this world foolishness. Surely he is but a trifler, as substituting a formal outward service for the religion of the heart; and he reverses our Lord's words in the text, "because he knows these things, most unhappy is he, because he does them not."

But some one may say, "It is so very *difficult* to serve God, it is so much against my own mind, such an effort, such a strain upon my strength to

bear Christ's yoke, I must give it over, or I must delay it at least. Can nothing be taken instead? I acknowledge His law to be most holy and true, and the accounts I read about good men are most delightful. I wish I were like them with all my heart; and for a little while I feel in a mind to set about imitating them. I have begun several times, I have had seasons of repentance, and set rules to myself; but for some reason or other I fell back after a while, and was even worse than before. I know, but I cannot do. O wretched man that I am!"

Now to such an one I say, You are in a much more promising state than if you were contented with yourself, and thought that knowledge was every thing, which is the grievous blindness which I have hitherto been speaking of; that is, you are in a better state, if you do not feel too much comfort or confidence in your confession. For *this* is the fault of many men; they make such an acknowledgment as I have described a *substitute* for real repentance; or allow themselves, after making it, to *put off* repentance, as if they could be suffered to give a word of promise which did not become due (so to say) for many days. You are, I admit, in a better state than if you were satisfied with yourself, *but you are not in a safe state.* If you were now to die, you would have no hope

of salvation: no hope, that is, if your own showing be true, for I am taking your own words. Go before God's judgment-seat, and there plead that you know the Truth and have not done it. This is what you frankly own;—how will it there be taken? "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee," says our Judge Himself, and who shall reverse His judgment? Therefore such an one must make the confession with great and real terror and shame, if it is to be considered a promising sign in him; else it is mere hardness of heart. For instance: I have heard persons say lightly, (every one must have heard them), that they own it would be a wretched thing indeed for them or their companions to be taken off suddenly. The young are especially apt to say this; that is, before they have come to an age to be callous, or have formed excuses to overcome the natural true sense of their conscience. They say they hope some day to repent. This is their own witness against themselves, like that bad prophet at Bethel who was constrained with his own mouth to utter God's judgments while he sat at his sinful meat. But let not such an one think that he will receive any thing of the Lord: he does not speak in faith.

When, then, a man complains of his hardness of heart or weakness of purpose, let him see to it

whether this complaint is more than a mere pretence to quiet his conscience, which is frightened at his putting off repentance; or, again, more than a mere idle word, said half in jest and half in compunction. But, should he be earnest in his complaint, then let him consider he has no need to complain. Every thing is plain and easy to the earnest; it is the double-minded who find difficulties. If you hate your own corruption in sincerity and truth, if you are really pierced to the heart that you do not do what you know you should do, if you *would* love God if you could, then the Gospel speaks to you words of peace and hope. It is a very different thing indolently to say, "I would I were a different man," and to close with God's offer to make you different when it is put before you. Here is the test between earnestness and insincerity. You say you wish to be a different man; Christ takes you at your word, so to speak; He offers to make you different. He says, "I will take away from you the heart of stone, the love of this world and its pleasures, if you will submit to My discipline." Here a man draws back. No; he cannot bear to *lose* the love of the world, to part with his present desires and tastes; he cannot *consent* to be changed. After all he is well satisfied at the bottom of his heart to remain as he is, only he

wants his conscience taken out of the way. Did Christ offer to do this for him, if He would but make bitter sweet and sweet bitter, darkness light and light darkness, *then* he would hail the glad tidings of peace;—till then he needs Him not.

But if a man is in earnest in wishing to get at the depths of his own heart, to expel the evil, to purify the good, and to gain power over himself, so as to do as well as know the Truth, what is the difficulty?—a matter of time indeed, but not of uncertainty is the recovery of such a man. So simple is the rule which he must follow, and so trite, that at first he will be surprised to hear it. God does great things by plain methods; and men start from them through pride, *because* they are plain. This was the conduct of Naaman the Syrian. Christ says, "Watch and pray;" herein lies our cure. To watch and to pray are surely in our power, and by these means we are certain of getting strength. You feel your weakness; you fear to be overcome by temptation: then keep out of the way of it. This is watching. Avoid society which is likely to mislead you; flee from the very shadow of evil; you cannot be too careful; better be a little too strict than a little too easy,—it is the safer side. Abstain from reading books which are dangerous to you. Turn from bad thoughts when they arise, set about

some business, begin conversing with some friend, or say to yourself the Lord's prayer reverently. When you are urged by temptation, whether it be by the threats of the world, false shame, self-interest, provoking conduct on the part of another, or the world's sinful pleasures, urged to be cowardly, or covetous, or unforgiving, or sensual, shut your eyes and think of Christ's precious blood-shedding. Do not dare to say...you cannot help sinning; a little attention to these points will go far, (through God's grace,) to keep you in the right way. And again, pray as well as watch. You must know that you can do nothing of yourself; your past experience has taught you this; therefore look to God for the will and the power; ask Him earnestly in His Son's name; seek His holy ordinances. Is not *this* in your power? Have you not power at least over the limbs of your body, so as to attend the means of grace constantly? Have you literally not the power to come hither; to observe the Fasts and Festivals of the Church; to come to His Holy Altar and receive the Bread of Life? Get yourself, at least, to do this; to put out the hand, to take His gracious Body and Blood; this is no arduous work;—and you say you really *wish* to gain the blessings He offers. What would you have more than a free gift, vouchsafed "without

money and without price?" So, make no more excuses; murmur not about your own bad heart, your knowing and resolving, and not doing. Here is your remedy.

Well were it if men could be persuaded to be in earnest; but few are thus minded. The many go on with a double aim, trying to serve both God and mammon. Few can get themselves to do what is right, *because* God tells them; they have another aim; they desire to please self or men. When they can obey God without offending the bad Master that rules them, then, and then only, they obey. Thus religion, instead of being the *first* thing in their estimation, is but the second. They differ, indeed, one from another what to put foremost: one man loves to be at ease, another to be busy, another to enjoy domestic comfort: but they agree in converting the Truth of God, which they know to be Truth, into a mere instrument of secular aims; not discarding the truth, but degrading it.

When He, the Lord of hosts, comes to shake terribly the earth, what number will He find of the remnant of the true Israel? We live in an educated age. The false gloss of a mere worldly refinement makes us decent and amiable. We all know and profess. We think ourselves wise; we flatter each other; we make excuses for our-

selves when we are conscious we sin, and thus we gradually lose the consciousness that we are sinning. We think our own times superior to all others. "Thou blind Pharisee!" This was the fatal charge brought by our blessed Lord against the falsely enlightened teachers of His own day. As then we desire to enter into life, let us come to Christ continually for the two foundations of true Christian faith,—humbleness of mind and earnestness!

SERMON X.

PROFESSION WITHOUT PRACTICE.

LUKE xii. 1.

"When there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, He began to say unto His disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

HYPOCRISY is a serious word. We are accustomed to consider the hypocrite as a hateful, despicable character, and an uncommon one. How is it, then, that our Blessed Lord, when surrounded by an innumerable multitude, began *first of all*, to warn His disciples against hypocrisy, as though they were in especial danger of becoming like those base deceivers, the Pharisees? Thus an instructive subject is opened to our consideration, which I will now pursue.

I say, we are accustomed to consider the hypocrite as a character of excessive wickedness, and of very rare occurrence. That hypocrisy is a great wickedness, need not be questioned; but

that it is an uncommon sin, is not true, as a little examination will show us. For what is a hypocrite? We are apt to understand by a hypocrite, one who makes a profession of religion for secret ends, without practising what he professes; who is malevolent, covetous, or profligate, while he assumes an outward sanctity in his words and conduct; and who does so deliberately and without remorse, deceiving others, and not at all self-deceived. Such a man, truly, would be a portent, for he seems to disbelieve the existence of a God who sees the heart. I will not deny that in some ages, nay, in all ages, a few such men have existed. But this is not what our Saviour seems to have meant by a hypocrite, nor were the Pharisees such.

The Pharisees, it is true, said one thing and did another; but they were not aware that they were thus inconsistent; they deceived *themselves* as well as others. Indeed, it is not in human nature to deceive others for any long time, without in a measure deceiving ourselves also. And in most cases, we contrive to deceive ourselves as much as we deceive others. The Pharisees boasted they were Abraham's children, not at all understanding, not knowing, what was implied in the term. They were not really included under the blessing given to Abraham, and they wished

the world to believe they were; but then they also themselves *thought* that they were, or, at least, with whatever misgivings, they were, on the whole, persuaded of it. They had deceived themselves as well as the world; and therefore our Lord sets before them the great and plain truth, which, simple as it was, they had forgotten. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham [1]."

This truth, I say, they had *forgotten;*—for doubtless, they once knew it. There was a time doubtless, when in some measure they knew themselves, and what they were doing. When they began (each of them in his turn) to deceive the people, they were *not*, at the moment, *self*-deceived. But by degrees they forgot,—because they did not care to retain it in their knowledge, —they forgot that to be blessed like Abraham, they must be holy like Abraham; that outward ceremonies avail nothing without inward purity, that their thoughts and motives must be heavenly. Part of their duty they altogether ceased to know; another part they might still know indeed, but did not value as they ought. They became ignorant of their own spiritual condition; it did not come home to them, that they were supremely influ-

[1] John viii. 39.

enced by worldly objects; that zeal for God's service was but a secondary principle in their conduct, and that they loved the praise of men better than God's praise. They went on merely talking of religion, of heaven and hell, the blessed and the reprobate, till their discourses became but words of course in their mouths, with no true meaning attached to them; and they either did not read Holy Scripture at all, or read it without earnestness and watchfulness to get at its real sense. Accordingly they were scrupulously careful of paying tithe even in the least matters, of mint, anise, and cummin, while they omitted the weightier matters of the Law, judgment, mercy, and faith; and on this account our Lord calls them "*blind* guides," — not bold impious deceivers, who *knew* that they were false guides, but *blind*[2]. Again, they were *blind,* in thinking that, had they lived in their fathers' days, they would not have killed the prophets as their fathers did. They did not know themselves; they had unawares deceived themselves as well as the people. Ignorance of their own ignorance was their punishment and the evidence of their sin. "If ye were blind," our Saviour says to them, if you were simply blind, and conscious you were so, and

[2] Matt. xxiii. 24; Luke xi. 39—52.

distressed at it, "ye should have no sin; but now ye say, We see,"—they did not even know their blindness — "therefore your sin remaineth[3]."

This then is hypocrisy;—not simply for a man to deceive others, knowing all the while that he *is* deceiving them, but to deceive himself *and* others at the same time, to aim at their praise by a religious profession without perceiving that he loves their praise more than the praise of God, and that he is professing far more than he practises. And if this be the true Scripture meaning of the word, we have some insight (as it appears) into the reasons which induced our Divine Teacher to warn His disciples in so marked a way against hypocrisy. An innumerable multitude was thronging Him, and His disciples were around Him. Twelve of them had been appointed to minister to Him as His especial friends. Other seventy had been sent out from Him with miraculous gifts; and, on their return, had with triumph told of their own wonderful doings. All of them had been addressed by Him as the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the children of His kingdom. *They* were the mediators between Him and the people at large, introducing to His notice

[3] John ix. 40, 41; Vide James i. 22.

the sick and heavy-laden. And now they stood by Him, partaking in His popularity, perhaps glorying in their connexion with the Christ, and pleased to be gazed upon by the impatient crowd. Then it was that, instead of addressing the multitude, He spoke first of all to His disciples, saying, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy;" as if He had said, "What is the chief sin of My enemies and persecutors? not that they openly deny God, but that they love a profession of religion for the sake of the praise of men that follows it. They like to contrast themselves with other men; they pride themselves on being a little flock, to whom life is secured in the midst of reprobates; they like to stand and be admired amid their religious performances, and think to be saved, not by their own personal holiness, but by the faith of their father, Abraham. All this delusion may come upon you also, if you forget that you are hereafter to be tried one by one at God's judgment-seat, according to your works. At present, indeed, you are invested in My greatness, and have the credit of My teaching and holiness: but 'there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid, that shall not be known,' at the last day."

This warning against hypocrisy becomes still

more needful and impressive from the greatness of the Christian privileges as contrasted with the Jewish. The Pharisees boasted they were Abraham's children; we have the infinitely higher blessing which fellowship with Christ imparts. In our infancy we have all been gifted with the most awful and glorious titles, as children of God, members of Christ, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. We have been honoured with the grant of spiritual influences, which have overshadowed and rested upon us, making our very bodies temples of God; and when we came to years of discretion, we were admitted to the mystery of a heavenly communication of the Body and Blood of Christ. What is more likely, considering our perverse nature, than that we should neglect the duties, while we wish to retain the privileges of our Christian profession? Our Lord has sorrowfully foretold in his parables what was to happen in His Church; for instance, when He compared it to a net which gathered of every kind, but not inspected till the end, and then emptied of its various contents, good and bad. Till the day of visitation the visible Church will ever be full of such hypocrites as I have described, who live on under her shadow, enjoying the name of Christian, and vainly fancying they will partake its ultimate blessedness.

Perhaps, however, it will be granted, that there are vast numbers in the Christian world thus professing without adequately practising; and yet denied, that such a case is enough to constitute a hypocrite in the Scripture sense of the word; as if a hypocrite were one who professes himself to be what he is not, *with some bad motive.* It may be urged that the Pharisees had an *end* in what they did, which careless and formal Christians have not. But consider for a moment what was the motive which urged the Pharisees to their hypocrisy? surely that they might be seen of men, have glory of men[4]. This is our Lord's own account of them. Now who will say that the esteem and fear of the world's judgment, and the expectation of worldly advantages, do not at present most powerfully influence the generality of men in their profession of Christianity? so much so, that it is a hard matter, and is thought a great and noble act for men who live in the public world to do what they believe to be their duty to God in a straightforward way, should the opinion of society about it happen to run counter to them. Indeed, there hardly has been a time since the Apostles' day, in which men were more likely than in this age to do their good deeds to

[4] Matt. vi. 2. 5.

be seen of men, to lay out for human praise, and therefore to shape their actions by the world's rule rather than God's will. We ought to be very suspicious, every one of us, of the soundness of our faith and virtue. Let us consider whether we should act as strictly as we now do, were the eyes of our acquaintance and neighbours withdrawn from us. Not that a regard to the opinion of others is a bad motive; in subordination to the fear of God's judgment, it is innocent and allowable, and in many cases a duty to admit it; and the opportunity of doing so is a gracious gift given from God to lead us forward in the right way. But when we *prefer* man's fallible judgment to God's unerring command, then it is we are wrong, —and in two ways; both *because* we prefer it, and because being fallible, it will mislead us; and what I am asking you, my brethren, is, not whether you merely regard man's opinion of you, (which you ought to do,) but whether you set it before God's judgment, which you assuredly should not do,—and which if you do, you are like the Pharisees, so far as to be hypocrites, though you may not go so far as they did in their hollow self-deceiving ways.

1. That even decently conducted Christians are most extensively and fearfully ruled by the opinion of society about them, instead of living by faith

in the unseen God, is proved to my mind by the following circumstance;—that according as their rank in life makes men independent of the judgment of others, so the profession of regularity and strictness is given up. There are two classes of men who are withdrawn from the judgment of the community; those who are above it, and those who are below it:—the poorest class of all, which has no thought of maintaining itself by its own exertions, and has lost shame; and what is called (to use a word of this world) high fashionable society, by which I mean not the rich necessarily, but those among the rich and noble who throw themselves out of the pale of the community, break the ties which attach them to others, whether above or below themselves, and then live to themselves and each other, their ordinary doings being unseen by the world at large. Now since it happens that these two ranks, the outlaws, as they may be called, of public opinion, are (to speak generally) the most openly and daringly profligate in their conduct, how much may be thence inferred about the influence of a mere love of reputation in keeping us *all* in the right way! It is plain, as a matter of fact, that the great mass of men are protected from gross sin by the forms of society. The received laws of propriety and decency, the prospect of a loss

of character, stand as sentinels, giving the alarm, long before their *Christian* principles have time to act. But among the poorest and rudest class, on the contrary, such artificial safeguards against crime are unknown; and (observe I say) it is among them and that other class I have mentioned, that vice and crime are most frequent. Are we, *therefore*, better than they? Scarcely. Doubtless their temptations are greater, which alone prevents our boasting over them; but, besides, do we not rather gain from the sight of their more scandalous sins a grave lesson and an urgent warning for ourselves, a call on us for honest self-examination? for we are of the same nature, with like passions with them; we may be better than they, but our mere seeming so is no proof that we are. The question is, whether, in spite of our greater apparent virtue, we should not fall like them, if the restraint of society were withdrawn; *i. e.* whether we are not in the main hypocrites like the Pharisees, professing to honour God, while we honour Him only so far as men require it of us?

2. Another test of being like or unlike the Pharisees may be mentioned. Our Lord warns us against hypocrisy in three respects,—in doing our alms, in praying, and in fasting. "When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet

before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men . . . . When thou prayest thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men . . . . When ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces that they may appear unto men to fast[5]." Here let us ask ourselves, first about our *alms*, whether we be not like the hypocrites. Doubtless some of our charity must be public, for the very mentioning our name encourages others to follow our example. Still I ask, is much of our charity also *private?* is as much private as is public? I will not ask whether *much more* is done in secret than is done before men, though this, if possible, ought to be the case. But at least, if we think in the first place of our public charities, and only in the second of the duty of private almsgiving, are we not plainly like the hypocritical Pharisees?

The manner of our *prayers* will supply us with a still stronger test. We are here assembled in worship. It is well. Have we really been praying as well as seeming to pray? have our minds been actively employed in trying to form in us the

[5] Matt. vi. 2—16.

but in sober earnestness, from real and full persuasion that it is true; that is, the men who have cast off their Saviour, console themselves with the idea, that their neighbours, though too timid or too indolent openly to do so, yet in secret, or at least in their real character, do the same. And witnessing this general inconsistency, they despise them as unmanly, cowardly, and slavish, and hate religion as the origin of this debasement of mind. "The people who in this country call themselves Christians, (says one of these men,) with few exceptions, are *not* believers; and every man of sense, whose bigotry has not blinded him, must see that persons who are evidently devoted to *worldly gain*, or *worldly vanities*, or *luxurious enjoyments*, though still preserving a little *decency*, while they *pretend* to believe the infinitely momentous doctrines of Christianity, are performers in a *miserable farce*, which is beneath contempt." Such are the words of an open enemy of Christ; as though he felt *he* dared confess his unbelief, and despised the mean hypocrisy of those around him. His argument, indeed, will not endure the trial of God's judgment at the last day, for no one is an unbeliever but by his own fault. But though no excuse for him, it is their condemnation. What, indeed, will they plead before the Throne of God, when on the revelation of all

hidden deeds, this reviler of religion attributes his unbelief in a measure to the sight of *their* inconsistent conduct? When he mentions this action or that conversation, this violent or worldly conduct, that covetous or unjust transaction, or that self-indulgent life, as partly the occasion of his falling away? "Woe unto the world (it is written), because of scandals; for it must needs be that scandals come, but woe to that man *by whom* the scandal cometh[8]!" Woe unto the deceiver and self-deceived! "His hope shall perish, his hope shall be cut off, and his trust shall be a spider's web: he shall lean upon his house, but it shall not stand; he shall hold it fast, but it shall not endure[9]." God give us grace to flee from this woe while we have time! Let us examine ourselves to see if there be any wicked way in us; let us aim at obtaining some comfortable assurance that we are in the narrow way that leads to life. And let us pray God to enlighten us, and to guide us, and to give us the will to please Him, and the power.

[8] Matt. xviii. 7.

[9] Job viii. 13—15.

SERMON XI.

PROFESSION WITHOUT HYPOCRISY.

GALATIANS iii. 27.

"As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ."

IT is surely most necessary to beware, as our Lord solemnly bids us, of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. We may be infected with it, even though we are not conscious of our insincerity; for they did not *know* they were hypocrites. Nor need we have any definite bad object plainly before us, for they had none,—only the vague desire to be seen and honoured by the world, such as may influence us. So it would seem, that there are vast multitudes of Pharisaical hypocrites among baptized Christians; i. e. men professing without practising. Nay, so far we may be called hypocritical, one and all; for no Christian on earth altogether lives up to his profession.

But here some one may ask, whether in saying that hypocrisy is professing without practising, I am not, in fact, overthrowing all external religion from the foundation, since all creeds, and prayers, and ordinances, go beyond the real belief and frame of mind of even the best Christians. This is even the ground which some men actually take. They say that it is wrong to baptize, and call Christians, those who have not yet shown themselves to be really such. "As many as are baptized into Christ, put on Christ;" so says the text, and these men argue from it, that till we have actually put on Christ, that is, till we have given our heart to Christ's service, and in our degree become holy as He is holy, it can do no good to be baptized into His name. Rather it is a great evil, for it is to become hypocrites. Nay, really humble, well-intentioned men, feel this about themselves. They shrink from retaining the blessed titles and privileges which Christ gave them in infancy, as being unworthy of them; and they fear lest they are really hypocrites like the Pharisees, after all their better thoughts and exertions.

Now the obvious answer to this mistaken view of religion is to say, that, on the showing of such reasoners, *no* one at all ought to be baptized in any case, and called a Christian; for no one *acts*

up to his baptismal profession; no one believes, worships, and obeys duly, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, whose servant he is made in baptism. And yet the Lord *did* say, "Go, baptize all nations;" clearly showing us, that a man may be a fit subject for baptism, though he does not in fact practise every thing that he professes, and therefore, that any fears we may have, lest men should be in some sense like the Pharisees, must not keep us from making them Christians.

But I shall treat the subject more at length, in order that we may understand what kind of disobedience is really hypocrisy, and what is not, lest timid consciences should be frightened. Now men profess without feeling and doing, or are hypocrites, in nothing so much as in their prayers. This is plain. Prayer is the most directly religious of all our duties; and our falling short of our duty, is, then, most clearly displayed. Therefore I will enlarge upon the case of prayer, to explain what I do *not* mean by hypocrisy. We then use the most solemn words, either without attending to what we are saying, or (even if we do attend,) without worthily entering into its meaning. Thus we seem to resemble the Pharisees; a question in consequence arises, whether, this being the case, we should go on repeating prayers which evidently do not suit us. The men I

just now spoke of, affirm that we ought to leave them off. Accordingly, such persons in their own case first give up the Church prayers, and take to others which they think will suit them better. Next, when these disappoint them, they have recourse to what is called extempore prayer; and afterwards perhaps, discontented in turn with this mode of addressing Almighty God, and as unable to fix their thoughts as they were before, they come to the conclusion that they ought not to pray, except when specially moved to prayer by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Now, in answer to such a manner of reasoning and acting, I would maintain that no one is to be reckoned a Pharisee or hypocrite in his prayers who *tries* not to be one,—who aims at knowing and correcting himself,—and who is accustomed to pray, though not perfectly, yet not indolently or in a self-satisfied way; however lamentable his actual wanderings of mind may be; or, again, however poorly he enters into the meaning of his prayers, even when he attends to them.

1. First, take the case of not being *attentive* to the prayers. Men, it seems, are tempted to leave off prayers because they cannot follow them, because they find their thoughts wander when they repeat them. I answer, that to pray attentively is a *habit*. This must ever be kept in mind. No

one *begins* with having his heart thoroughly in them; but by trying, he is enabled to attend more and more, and at length, after many trials and a long schooling of himself, to fix his mind steadily on them. No one (I repeat) *begins* with being attentive. Novelty in prayers is the cause of persons being attentive in the outset, and novelty is out of the question in the Church prayers; for we have heard them from childhood, and knew them by heart long before we could understand them. No one, then, when he first turns his thoughts to religion, finds it easy to pray; he is irregular in his religious feelings; he prays more earnestly at some times than at others; his devotional seasons come by fits and starts; he cannot account for his state of mind, or reckon upon himself; he frequently finds that he is more disposed for prayer at any time and place than those set apart for the purpose. All this is to be expected; for no habit is formed at once; and before the flame of religion in the heart is purified and strengthened by long practice and experience, of course it will be capricious in its motions, it will flare about (so to say) and flicker, and at times seem almost to go out.

However, impatient men do not well consider this; they overlook or are offended at the necessity of humble, tedious practice to enable them to

pray attentively, and they account for their coldness and wanderings of thought in any way but the true one. Sometimes they attribute this inequality in their religious feelings to the arbitrary coming and going of God's Holy Spirit; a most irreverent and presumptuous judgment, which I should not mention, except that men *do* form it, and therefore it is necessary to state in order to condemn it. Again, sometimes they think that they shall make themselves attentive all at once by bringing before their minds the more sacred doctrines of the Gospel, and thus rousing and constraining their souls. This does for a time; but when the novelty is over, they find themselves relapsing into their former inattention, without apparently having made any advance. And others again, when discontented with their wanderings during prayer, lay the fault on the prayers themselves as being too long. This is a common excuse, and I wish to call your attention to it.

If any one alleges the *length* of the Church prayers as a reason for his not keeping his mind fixed upon them, I would beg him to ask his conscience whether he sincerely believes this to be at bottom the real cause of his inattention? Does he think he should attend *better* if the prayers were shorter? This is the question he has to

consider. If he answers that he believes he *should* attend more closely in that case, then I go on to ask, whether he attends more closely, (as it *is*,) to the first part of the service than to the last; whether his mind is his own, regularly fixed on what he is engaged in, for any time in any part of the service? Now, if he is obliged to own that this is not the case, that his thoughts are wandering in all parts of the service, and that even during the Confession, or the Lord's Prayer, which come first, they are not his own, it is quite clear that it is not the *length* of the service which is the real cause of his inattention, but his being deficient *in the habit* of being attentive. If, on the other hand, he answers that he *can* fix his thoughts for a time, and during the early part of the service, I would have him reflect that even this degree of attention was not always his own, that *it* has been the work of time and practice; and, if by trying he has got so far, by trying he may go on, and learn to attend for a still longer time, till at length he is able to keep up his attention through the whole service.

However, I wish chiefly to speak to such as are dissatisfied with themselves, and despair of attending properly. Let a man once set his heart upon learning to pray, and strive to learn, and no failures he may continue to make in his manner

of praying are sufficient to cast him from God's favour. Let him but persevere, not discouraged at his wanderings, not frightened into a notion he is a hypocrite, not shrinking from the honourable titles which God puts on him. Doubtless he should be humbled at his own weakness, indolence, and carelessness; and he should feel (he cannot feel too much) the guilt, alas! which he is ever contracting in his prayers by the irreverence of his inattention. Still he must not leave off his prayers, but go on looking towards Christ his Saviour. Let him but be in earnest, striving to master his thoughts, and to be serious, and all the guilt of his incidental failings will be washed away in his Lord's blood. Only let him not be contented with himself; only let him not neglect to *attempt* to obey. What a simple rule it is, to *try* to be attentive in order to be so! and yet it is continually overlooked; that is, we do not *systematically* try, we do not make a point of attempting and attempting over and over again in spite of bad success; we attempt only now and then, and our best devotion is merely when our hearts are excited by some accident which may or may not happen again.

So much on inattention to our prayers, which, I say, should not surprise or frighten us, which does not prove us to be hypocrites unless we

acquiesce in it; or oblige us to leave them off, but rather to learn to attend to them.

2. I proceed, secondly, to remark on the difficulty of *entering into* the meaning of them, when we *do* attend to them.

Here a tender conscience will ask, "How is it possible I *can* rightly use the solemn words which occur in the prayers?" A tender conscience *alone* speaks thus. Those confident objectors whom I spoke of just now, who maintain that set prayer is necessarily a mere formal service in the generality of instances, a service in which the heart has no part, they are silent here. They do not feel *this* difficulty, which is the real one; they use the most serious and awful words lightly and without remorse, as if they really entered into the meaning of what is, in truth, beyond the intelligence of Angels. But the humble and contrite believer, coming to Christ for pardon and help, perceives the great strait he is in, in having to address the God of Heaven. This perplexity of mind it was which led convinced sinners in former times to seek refuge in beings short of God; not as denying God's supremacy, or shunning Him, but discerning the vast distance between themselves and Him, and seeking some resting places by the way, some Zoar, some little city near to flee

unto[1], because of the height of God's mountain, up which the way of escape lay. And then gradually becoming devoted to those whom they trusted, Saints, Angels, or good men living, and copying them, their faith had a fall, and their virtue trailed upon the ground, for want of props to rear it heavenward. We Christians, sinners though we be like other men, are not allowed thus to debase our nature, or to defraud ourselves of God's mercy; and though it be very terrible to speak to the living God, yet speak we must, or die; tell our sorrows we must, or there is no hope; for created mediators and patrons are forbidden us, and to trust in an arm of flesh is made a sin.

Therefore let a man reflect, whoever from tenderness of conscience shuns the Church as above him, (whether he shuns her services, or her sacraments,) that, awful as it is to approach Christ, to speak to Him, to "eat His flesh and drink His blood," and to live in Him, *to whom shall he go?* See what it comes to. Christ is the only way of salvation open to sinners. Truly we *are* children, and cannot suitably feel the words which the Church teaches us, though we say them after her, nor feel duly reverent at God's presence! Yet

[1] Gen. xix. 20.

let us but know our own ignorance and weakness, and we are safe. God accepts those who thus come in faith, bringing nothing as their offering, but a confession of sin. And this is the highest excellence to which we ordinarily attain; to understand our own hypocrisy, insincerity, and shallowness of mind,—to own, while we pray, that we cannot pray aright,—to repent of our repentings, —and to submit ourselves wholly to His judgment, who could indeed be extreme with us, but has already shown His loving-kindness in bidding us to pray. And, while we thus conduct ourselves, we must learn to feel that God knows all this before we say it, and far better than we do. He does not need to be informed of our extreme worthlessness. We must pray in the spirit and the temper of the extremest abasement, but we need not search for adequate words to express this, for in truth no words are bad enough for our case. Some men are dissatisfied with the confessions of sin we make in Church, as not being strong enough; but none *can* be strong enough; let us be satisfied with sober words, which have been ever in use; it will be a great thing if we enter into *them*. No need of searching for impassioned words to express our repentance, when we do not rightly enter even into the most ordinary expressions.

Therefore when we pray, let us not be as the hypocrites, making a show; nor use vain repetitions with the heathen; let us compose ourselves, and kneel down quietly as to a work far above us, preparing our minds for our own imperfection in prayer, meekly repeating the wonderful words of the Church our Teacher, and desiring with the Angels to look into them. When we call God our Father Almighty, or own ourselves miserable offenders, and beg Him to spare us, let us recollect that, though we are using a strange language, yet Christ is pleading for us in the same words with full understanding of them, and availing power; and that, though we know not what we should pray for as we ought, yet the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with plaints unutterable. Thus feeling God to be around us and in us, and therefore keeping ourselves still and collected, we shall serve Him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; and we shall take back with us to our common employments the assurance that He is still gracious to us, in spite of our sins, not willing we should perish, desirous of our perfection, and ready to form us day by day after the fashion of that divine image which in baptism was outwardly stamped upon us.

I have spoken only of our prayers, and but referred to our general profession of Christianity.

It is plain, however, what has been said about praying, may be applied to all we do and say as Christians. It is true that we profess to be saints, to be guided by the highest principles, and to be ruled by the Spirit of God. We have long ago promised to believe and obey. It is also true that we cannot do these things aright; nay, even with God's help, (such is our sinful weakness,) still we fall short of our duty. Nevertheless we must not cease to profess. We must not put off from us the wedding garment which Christ gave us in baptism. We may still rejoice in Him without being hypocrites, that is, if we labour day by day to make that wedding garment our own; to fix it on us and so incorporate it with ourselves, that death, which strips us of all things, may be unable to tear it from us, though as yet it be in great measure but an outward garb covering our own nakedness.

I conclude by reminding you, how great God's mercy is in allowing us to clothe ourselves in the glory of Christ from the first, even before we are worthy[3] of it. I suppose there is nothing so distressing to a true Christian as to have to *prove himself* such to others; both as being conscious of his own numberless failings, and from his dis-

[3] Matt. xxii. 8. Col. i. 10.

like of display. Now Christ has anticipated the difficulties of his modesty. He does not allow such an one to speak for himself; He speaks for him. He introduces each of us to his brethren, not as we are in ourselves, fit to be despised and rejected on account of "the temptations which are in our flesh," but "as messengers of God, even as Christ Jesus." It is our happiness that we need bring nothing in proof of our fellowship with Christians, besides our baptism. This is what a great many persons do not understand; they think that none are to be accounted fellow-Christians but those who evidence themselves to be such to their fallible understandings; and hence they encourage others, who wish for their praise, to practise all kinds of display, as a seal of their regeneration. Who can tell the harm this does to the true modesty of the Christian spirit? Instead of using the words of the Church and speaking to God, men are led to use their own words, and make man their judge and justifier[3]. They think it necessary to tell out their secret feelings, and to enlarge on what God has done to their own souls in particular. And thus making themselves really answerable for all the words they use, which are altogether their own, they do in this case become

[3] 1 Cor. iv. 3—5.

hypocrites; they do say more than they can in reality feel. Of course a religious man will naturally, and unawares, out of the very fulness of his heart, show his deep feeling and his conscientiousness to his near friends; but when to do so is made a matter of *necessity*, an *object* to be aimed at, and is an *intentional* act, then it is that hypocrisy must, more or less, sully our faith. "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ;" this is the Apostle's decision. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." The Church follows this rule, and bidding us keep quiet, speaks for us; robes us from head to foot in the garments of righteousness, and exhorts us to live henceforth to God. But the disputer of this world reverses this procedure; he strips off all our privileges, bids us renounce our dependance on the Mother of saints, tells us we must each be a Church to himself, and must show himself to the world to be by himself and in himself the elect of God, in order to prove his right to the privileges of a Christian.

Far be it from us thus to fight against God's gracious purposes to man, and to make the weak brother perish for whom Christ died[4]! Let us

[4] 1 Cor. viii. 11.

acknowledge all to be Christians, who have not by open word or deed renounced their fellowship with us, and let us try to lead them on into all truth. And for ourselves let us endeavour to enter more and more fully into the meaning of our own prayers and professions; let us humble ourselves for the very little we do, and the poor advance we make; let us avoid unnecessary display of religion; let us do our duty in that state of life to which God has called us. Thus proceeding, we shall, through God's grace, form within us the glorious mind of Christ. Whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, walking by this rule, we shall become, at length, true saints, sons of God. We shall be upright and perfect, lights in the world, the image of Him who died that we might be conformed to His likeness.

SERMON XII.

PROFESSION WITHOUT OSTENTATION.

MATTHEW v. 14.

"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid."

OUR SAVIOUR gives us a command, in this passage of His Sermon on the Mount, to manifest our religious profession before all men. "Ye are the light of the world," He says to His disciples; "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Yet presently He says, "When thou doest alms . . . when thou prayest . . . when ye fast . . . appear not unto men . . . but unto thy Father which is in secret[1]." How are these commands to be re-

[1] Matt. vi. 2—18.

conciled? how are we at once to *profess* ourselves Christians, and yet hide our Christian words, deeds, and self-denials?

I will now attempt to answer this question; that is, to explain how we may be witnesses to the world for God, and yet without pretension or affectation, or rude and indecent ostentation.

1. Now, first, much might be said on that mode of witnessing Christ which consists in conforming to His Church. He who simply did what the Church bids him do, (if he did no more,) would witness a good confession to the world, and one which cannot be hid; and at the same time, with very little, if any, personal display. He does only what he is told to do; he takes no responsibility on himself. The Apostles and Martyrs who founded the Church, the Saints in all ages who have adorned it, the Heads of it now alive, all these take from him the weight of his profession, and bear the blame (so to call it) of seeming ostentatious. I do not say, that irreligious men will not *call* such an one boastful, or austere, or a hypocrite; that is not the question. The question is, whether in *God's* judgment he *deserves* the censure; whether he is not as Christ would have him, *really and truly* (whatever the world may say) joining humility to a bold outward profession; whether he is not, in thus acting,

preaching Christ without hurting his own pureness, gentleness, and modesty of character. If indeed a man stands forth *on his own ground*, declaring himself as an individual a witness for Christ, then indeed he *is* grieving and disturbing the calm spirit given us by God. But God's merciful providence has saved us this temptation, and forbidden us to admit it. He bids us unite together in one, and to shelter our personal profession under the authority of the general body. Thus, while we show ourselves as lights to the world far more effectively than if we glimmered separately in the lone wilderness without communication, at the same time we do so with far greater secrecy and humility. Therefore it is, that the Church does so many things for us, appoints Fasts and Feasts, times of public prayer, the order of the sacraments, the services of devotion at marriages and deaths, and all accompanied by a fixed form of sound words; in order, (I say,) to remove from us individually the burden of a high profession, of implying great things of ourselves by inventing for ourselves solemn prayers and praises,—a task far above the generality of Christians, to say the least, a task which humble men will shrink from, lest they prove hypocrites, and which will hurt those who *do* undertake it, by making them rude-spirited and profane. I am

desirous of speaking on this subject as a matter of *practice ;* for I am sure, that if we wish really and in fact to spread the knowledge of the Truth, we shall do so far more powerfully as *well* as purely, by keeping together, than by witnessing one by one. Men are to be seen adopting all kinds of strange ways of giving glory (as they think) to God. If they would but follow the Church ; come together in prayer on Sundays and Saints' days, nay, every day ; honour the rubric by keeping to it obediently, and conforming their families to the *spirit* of the Prayer-book, I say, that on the whole they would practically do vastly more good than by trying new religious plans, founding new religious societies, or striking out new religious views. I put out of account the greater blessing they might expect to find in the way of duty, which is the first consideration.

2. One way of professing without display has been mentioned ;—obeying the Church. Now in the next place, consider how great a profession, and yet a profession how unconscious and modest, arises from the mere ordinary manner in which any strict Christian lives. Let this thought be a satisfaction to uneasy minds which fear lest they are not confessing Christ, yet dread to display. Your *life* displays Christ without your intending it. You cannot help it. Your *words and deeds*

will show on the long run (as it is said), where your treasure is, and your heart. Out of the abundance of your heart your mouth speaketh words "seasoned with salt." We sometimes find men who aim at doing their duty in the common course of life, *surprised* to hear that they are ridiculed, and called hard names by careless or worldly persons. This is as it should be; it is as it should be, that they are *surprised* at it. If a private Christian sets out with *expecting* to make a disturbance in the world, the fear is, lest he be not so humble-minded as he should be. But those who go on quietly in the way of obedience, and yet are detected by the keen eye of the jealous, self-condemning, yet proud world, and who, on discovering their situation, first shrink from it and are distrest, then look to see if they have done aught wrongly, and after all are sorry for it, and but slowly and very timidly (if at all) learn to rejoice in it, these are Christ's flock. These are they who follow Him who was meek and lowly of heart, His elect in whom He sees His own image reflected. Consider how such men show forth their light in a wicked world, yet unconsciously. Moses came down from the mount, and "wist not that the skin of his face shone" as one who had held intercourse with God. But "when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw

Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come nigh him [2]." Who can estimate the power of our separate words spoken in season! How many of them are recollected and cherished by this person or that which *we* have forgotten, and bear fruit! How do our good deeds excite *others* to rivalry in a good cause, as the Angels perceive though we do not! How are men thinking of us we never heard of, or saw but once, and in far countries unknown! Let us for a moment view this pleasing side of our doings, as well as the sad prospect of our evil communications. Doubtless, our prayers and alms are rising as a sweet sacrifice, pleasing to God [3]; and pleasing to Him, not only as an office of devotion, but of charity towards all men. Our businesses and our amusements, our joys and our sorrows, our opinions, tastes, studies, views and principles, are drawn *one* way, heavenward. Be we high or low, in our place we can serve, and in consequence glorify Him who died for us. "A little maid," who was "brought away captive out of the land of Israel, and waited on Naaman's wife [4]," pointed out to the great captain of the host of the king of Syria the means of recovery from his leprosy, and "his *servants*" spoke good words to him after-

[2] Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. [3] Acts x. 4. [4] 2 Kings v. 2.

wards, and brought him back to his reason when he would have have rejected the mode of cure which the prophet prescribed. This may quiet impatient minds, and console the over-scrupulous conscience. "Wait on God and be doing good," and you must, you cannot but be showing your light before men as a city on a hill.

3. Still it is quite true that there are circumstances under which a Christian is bound openly to express his opinion on religious subjects and matters; and this is the real difficulty; viz. how to do so without display. As a man's place in society is here or there, so is it more or less his duty to speak his mind freely. We must never countenance sin and error. Now the more obvious and modest way of discountenancing evil is by silence, and by separating from it; for example, we are bound to keep aloof from deliberate and open sinners. St. Paul expressly tells us, "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother (i. e. a Christian) be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, no not to eat[s]." And St. John gives us the like advice with respect to heretics. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, (i. e. the true

[s] 1 Cor. v. 11.

doctrine of Christ,) receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds[6]." It is plain that such conduct on our part requires no great display, for it is but conforming to the rules of the Church; though it *is* often difficult to know on what occasions we ought to adopt it, which is another question.

A more difficult duty is that of passing judgment, (as a Christian is often bound to do,) on events of the day and public men. It becomes his duty, in proportion as he has station and influence in the community, in order that he may persuade others to think as he does. Above all, clergymen are bound to form and pronounce an opinion. It is sometimes said in familiar language, that a clergyman should have nothing to do with politics. This is true, if it be meant that he should not aim at secular objects, should not side with a political party as such, should not be ambitious of popular applause, or the favour of great men, should not take pleasure and lose time in business of this world, should not be covetous. But if it means that he should not express an opinion and exert an influence one way rather than another, it is plainly unscriptural. Did not

[6] 2 John 10, 11.

the Apostles, with all their reverence for the temporal power, whether Jewish or Roman, and all their separation from worldly ambition, did they not still denounce their rulers as wicked men, who had crucified and slain the Lord's Christ[7]? and would they have been as a city on a hill if they had not done so? *If*, indeed, this world's concerns could be altogether disjoined from those of Christ's kingdom, then indeed all Christians, (laymen as well as clergy,) should abstain from the thought of temporal affairs, and let the worthless world pass down the stream of events till it perishes; but if (as is the case) what happens in *nations* must affect the cause of *religion* in those nations, since the Church may be seduced and corrupted by the world, and in the world there are myriads of souls to be converted and saved, and since a Christian nation is bound to become part of the Church, therefore it is our duty to stand as a beacon on a hill, to cry aloud and spare not, to lift up our voice like a trumpet, and show the people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins[8]. And all this may be done without injury to our Christian gentleness and humbleness, though it is difficult to do it. We need not be angry nor use contentious words, and

[7] Acts ii. 23. iii. 13—17. iv. 27. xiii. 27. [8] Isa. lviii. 1.

yet may firmly give our opinion, in proportion as we have the means of forming one, and be zealous towards God in all active good service, and scrupulously and pointedly keep aloof from the bad men whose evil arts we fear.

Another and still more difficult duty is that of personally rebuking those we meet with in the intercourse of life who sin in word or deed, and testifying before them in Christ's name; that is, it is difficult at once to be unassuming and zealous in such cases. We know it is a plain and repeated precept of Christ to tell others of their faults for charity's sake; but how is this to be done without seeming, nay, without being, arrogant and severe? There are persons who are anxious to do their duty to the full, who fear that they are deficient in this particular branch of it, and deficient from a blameable backwardness, and the dread of giving offence; yet, on the other hand, they feel the painfulness of rebuking another, and, (to use a common word,) the awkwardness of it. Such persons must consider that, though to rebuke is a duty, it is not a duty belonging at once to all men; and the perplexity which is felt about it often arises from the very impropriety of attempting it in the particular case. It is improper, as a general rule, in the young to witness before the old, otherwise than by their silence. Still more improper

is it in inferiors to rebuke their superiors; for instance, a child his parent, of course; or a private person his natural and divinely-appointed governor. When we assume a character not suited to us, of course we feel awkward; and although we may have done so in honesty and zeal (however ill-tutored), and so God may in mercy accept our service, still He, at the same time, rebukes us by our very feeling of perplexity and shame.—As for such as rudely blame another, and that a superior, and feel no pain at doing so, I have nothing to say to such men, except to express my earnest desire that they may be led into a more Christian frame of mind. They do not even feel the difficulty of witnessing for God without display.

It is to be considered, too, that to do the part of a witness for the truth, to warn and rebuke, is not an elementary duty of a Christian. I mean, that our duties come in a certain order, some before others, and that this is not one of the first of them. Our first duties are to repent and believe. It would be strange, indeed, for a man who had just begun to think of religion, to set up for "some great one," to assume he was a saint and a witness, and to exhort others to turn to God. This is evident. But as time goes on, and his religious character becomes formed, then, while he goes on to perfection in all his duties, he takes

upon himself, in the number of these, to witness for God by word of mouth. It is difficult to say, *when* a man has leave openly to rebuke others; certainly not before he has considerable humility; the test of which may be the absence of a feeling of triumph in doing it, a consciousness that he is no better by nature than the person he witnesses before, and that his actual sins are such as to deserve a severe rebuke, were they known to the world; a love towards the person reproved, and a willingness to submit to deserved censure in his turn. In all this I am speaking of laymen. It is a clergyman's duty to rebuke by virtue of his office. And then, after all, supposing it be clearly our duty to manifest our religious profession in this pointed way before another, in order to do so modestly we must do so kindly and cheerfully, as gently as we can; doing it as little as we can help; not making matters worse than they are, or showing our whole Christian stature (or what we think to be such), when we need but put out a hand (so to say) or give a glance. And above all, (as I have already said,) acting as if we thought, nay really thinking, that it may be the offender's turn some day to rebuke us; not putting ourselves above him, feeling our great imperfections, and desirous he should rebuke us, should occasion require it, and in prospect thanking him;

acting, that is, in the spirit in which you warn a man in walking against rugged ground, which may cause him a fall, thinking him bound by your friendly conduct, to do the like favour to you. As to grave occasions of witnessing Christ, they will seldom occur, except a man thrust himself into society where he never ought to have been, by neglecting the rule, "come ye out, and be separate;" and then he has scarcely the right to rebuke, having committed the first fault himself. This is another cause of our perplexity in witnessing Christ before the world. We make friends of the sinful and then they have the advantage over us.

To conclude.—The question is often raised, whether a man can do his duty simply and quietly, without being thought ostentatious by the world. It is no great matter to himself whether he is thought so or not, if he has not provoked the opinion. As a general rule, I would say the Church itself is always hated and calumniated by the world, as being in duty bound to make a bold profession. But whether individual members of the Church are so treated, depends on various circumstances in the case of each. There *are* persons, who, though very strict and conscientious Christians, are yet praised by the world. These are such, as having great meekness

and humility, are not so prominent in station or so practically connected with the world as to offend it. Men admire religion, while they can gaze on it as a picture. They think it lovely in books; and as long as they can look upon Christians at a distance, they speak well of them. The Jews in Christ's time built the sepulchres of the prophets whom their fathers killed; then they themselves killed the Just One. They "reverenced" the Son of God before He came, but when their passions and interests were stirred by His coming, then they said, "This is the Heir, come, let us kill Him, and the inheritance shall be ours[9]." Thus Christians in active life, thwarting (as they do) the pride and selfishness of the world, are disliked by the world, and have "all manner of evil said against them falsely for Christ's sake[1]." Still, even under these circumstances, though they must not shrink from the attack on a personal account, it is still their duty to shelter themselves, as far as they can, under the name and authority of the Holy Church; to keep to its ordinances and rules; and, if they are called to suffer for the Church, rather to be drawn forward to the suffering in the common course of duty, than boldly to take upon them the task of defending it. There

[9] Mark xii. 7. [1] Matt. v. 11.

is no cowardice in this. Some men are placed in posts of danger, and to these danger comes in the way of duty; but others must not intrude into their honourable office. Thus in the first age of the Gospel, our Lord told His followers to fly from city to city, when persecuted; and even the heads of the Church, in the early persecutions, instead of exposing themselves to the fury of the heathen, did their utmost to avoid it. We are a suffering people from the first; but, while on the one hand, we do not defend ourselves illegally, we do not court suffering on the other. We must witness and glorify God, as lights on a hill, through evil report and good report; but the evil and the good report is not so much of our own making as the natural consequence of our Christian profession.

Who can tell God's will concerning this tumultuous world, or how He will dispose of it? He is tossing it hither and thither in His fury, and in its agitation He troubles His own people also. Only, this we know for our comfort. Our light shall never go down; Christ set it upon a hill, and hell shall not prevail against it. The Church will witness on to the last for the Truth, chained indeed to this world, its evil partner, but ever foretelling its ruin, though not believed, and in the end promised a far different recompense. For in

the end the Lord Omnipotent shall reign, when the marriage of the Lamb shall come at length, and His wife shall make herself ready; and to her shall be granted "fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints[2]." True and righteous are His judgments; He shall cast death and hell into the lake of fire, and avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him!

"Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." May all we be in the number, confessing Christ in this world, that He may confess us before His Father in the last day!

[2] Rev. xix. 6—8.

SERMON XIII.

TIMES OF PRIVATE PRAYER.

MATTHEW vi. 6.

"Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

HERE is our Saviour's own sanction and blessing vouchsafed to private prayer, in simple, clear, and most gracious words. The Pharisees were in the practice, when they prayed by themselves, of praying in *public*, in the corners of the streets; a strange inconsistency according to our notions, since in our language prayer by oneself is ever called *private* prayer. Public private prayer, this was their self-contradictory practice. Warning, then, His disciples against the particular form of hypocrisy in which the self-conceit of human nature at that day showed itself, our Lord promises in the text His Father's blessing on such humble supplications as were really addressed to

Him, and not made to gain the praise of men. Those who seek the unseen God, (He seems to say,) seek Him in their hearts and hidden thoughts, not in loud words, as if He were far off from them. Such men would retire from the world into places where no human eye saw them, there to meet Him humbly and in faith, who is "about their path, and about their bed, and spieth out all their ways." And He, the searcher of hearts, would reward them openly. Prayers uttered in secret, according to God's will, are treasured up in God's Book of Life. They seem, perhaps, to have sought an answer here, and to have failed. Their memory perishes even in the mind of the petitioner, and the world never knew of them. But God is ever mindful, and in the last day, when the books are opened, they shall be disclosed and rewarded before the whole world.

Such is Christ's gracious promise in the text, acknowledging and blessing, in His condescension, those devotional exercises which were a duty even before Scripture enjoined them; and changing into a privilege that work of faith, which, though bidden by conscience, and authorized by reason, yet before He revealed His mercy, is laden, in every man's case who attempts it, with guilt, remorse, and fear. It is the Christian's unspeakable privilege, and his alone, that he has at all

times free access to the throne of grace through the mediation of his Lord and Saviour.

But, in what I shall now say concerning prayer, I shall not consider it as a privilege, but as a duty; for till we have some experience of the duties of religion, we are incapable of entering duly into the privileges; and it is too much the fashion of the day to view prayer chiefly as a mere privilege, such a privilege as it is inconsiderate indeed to neglect, but only inconsiderate, not sinful; and optional to use.

Now, we know well enough that we are bound to be in one sense in prayer and meditation all the day long. The question then arises, are we to pray in any other way? Is it enough to keep our minds fixed upon God through the day, and to commune with Him in our hearts, or is it necessary, over and above this habitual faith, to set apart particular times for the more systematic and earnest exercise of it? Need we pray at certain times of the day in a set manner? *Public* worship indeed, from its very nature, requires *places, times,* and even set *forms.* But *private* prayer does not necessarily require set *times,* because we have no one to consult but ourselves, and we are always with ourselves; nor *forms,* for there is no one else whose thoughts are to keep pace with ours. Still, though set times and forms

of prayer are not absolutely *necessary* in private prayer, yet they are highly expedient; or rather, times are actually commanded us by our Lord in the text, "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly."

In these words certain *times* for private prayer, over and above the secret thought of God which must ever be alive in us, are clearly enjoined; and the practice of good men in Scripture gives us an example in confirmation of the command. Even our Saviour had His peculiar seasons of communing with God. *His* thoughts indeed were one continued sacred service offered up to His Father; nevertheless, we read of His going up "into a mountain apart to pray," and again, of His "continuing all night in prayer to God[1]." Doubtless, you well recollect that solitary prayer of His, before His passion, thrice repeated, "that the cup might pass from Him." St. Peter too, as in the narrative of the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion, in the tenth chapter of the Acts, went up upon the house-top to pray about the sixth hour; then God visited him. And

[1] Matt. xiv. 23. Luke vi. 12.

Nathanael seems to have been in prayer under the fig-tree, at the time our Saviour saw him, and Philip called him[2]. I might multiply instances from Scripture of such Israelites without guile; which are of course applicable to us, because, though they were under a divine government in many respects different from the Christian, yet *personal* religion is the same at all times; "the just" in every dispensation "shall live by faith," and whatever reasons there were then for faith to display and maintain itself by stated prayer, remain substantially the same now. Let two passages suffice. The Psalmist says, "*Seven* times a day do I praise Thee, because of Thy righteous judgments[3]." And Daniel's practice is told us on a memorable occasion: "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, (the impious decree, forbidding prayer to any but king Darius for thirty days,) he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees *three times* a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, *as he did aforetime*[4]."

It is plain, then, besides the devotional temper in which we should pass the day, more solemn and direct acts of worship, nay, *regular and periodical*,

[2] John i. 48. [3] Psalm cxix. 164. [4] Dan. vi. 10.

are required of us by the precept of Christ, and His own example, and that of His Apostles and Prophets under both covenants.

Now it is necessary to insist upon this duty of observing private prayer at stated times, because amid the cares and hurry of life men are very apt to neglect it: and it is a much more important duty than it is generally considered, even by those who perform it.

It is important for the two reasons which follow.

1. It brings religious subjects before the mind in regular course. Prayer *through* the day, is indeed the characteristic of a Christian spirit, but we may be sure that, in most cases, those who do not pray at stated times in a more solemn and direct manner, will never pray well at other times. We know in the common engagements of life, the importance of collecting and arranging our thoughts calmly and accurately before proceeding to any important business, in order to the right performance of it; and so in that one really needful occupation, the care of our eternal interests, if we would have our minds composed, our desires subdued, and our tempers heavenly through the day, we must, before commencing the day's employment, stand still awhile to look into ourselves, and commune with our hearts, by way of preparing ourselves for the trials and duties on

which we are entering. A like reason may be assigned for evening prayer, viz. as affording us a time of looking back on the day past, and summing up (as it were) that account, which if *we* do not reckon, at least God has reckoned, and written down in that book which will be produced at the judgment; a time of confessing sin, and of praying for forgiveness, of giving thanks for what we have done well, and for mercies received, of making good resolutions in reliance on the help of God, and of sealing up and setting sure the day past, at least as a stepping-stone of good for the morrow. The precise times indeed of private prayer are no where commanded us in Scripture; the most obvious are those I have mentioned, morning and evening. In the texts just now read to you, you heard of praying three times a day, or seven times. All this depends of course on the opportunities of each individual. Some men have not leisure for this; but for morning and evening prayer all men can and should *make* leisure.

Stated times of private prayer, then, are useful as impulses (so to say) to the continuous devotion of the day. They instruct us and engage us in what is ever our duty. It is commonly said, that what is every one's business is practically no one's; this applies here. I repeat it, if we leave

religion as a subject of thought for all hours of the day equally, it will be thought of in none. In all things it is by small beginnings and appointed channels, that an advance is made to extensive works. Stated times of prayer put us in that posture, (as I may call it) in which we ought ever to be; they urge us forward in a heavenly direction, and then the stream carries us on. For the same reason it is expedient, if possible, to be solemn in the forms of our private worship, in order to impress our minds. Our Saviour *kneeled* down, fell on His face, and prayed[5],—so did His Apostles[6]; and so did the Saints of the Old Testament. Hence many persons are accustomed (such as have the opportunity) to set apart a particular place for their private devotions; still for the same reason, to compose their mind,—as Christ tells us in the text, to enter into our closet.

2. I now come to the second reason for stated private prayer. Besides its tending to produce in us lasting religious impressions, which I have already enlarged upon, it is also a more direct means of gaining from God an answer to our requests. He has so sanctioned it in the text:—

[5] Matt. xxvi. 39. Luke xxii. 41.

[6] Acts xx. 36. xxi. 5. Eph. iii. 14.

"Shut thy door, and pray to thy Father which seeth in secret, and He shall reward thee openly." We do not know *how* it is that prayer receives an answer from God at all. It is strange, indeed, that weak man should have strength to move God; but it is our privilege to know that we *can* do so. The whole system of this world is a history of man's interfering with Divine decrees; and if we have the melancholy power of baffling His good-will, to our own ruin, (an awful, an incomprehensible truth!) if, when He designs our eternal salvation, we can yet annul our heavenly election, and accomplish our eternal destruction, much more have we the power to move Him (blessed be His name!) when He, the Searcher of hearts, discerns in us the mind of that Holy Spirit, which "maketh intercession for the saints according to His will." And, as He has thus promised an answer to our poor prayers, so it is not more strange that prayers offered up at particular times, and in a particular way, should have especially prevailing power with Him. And the reason of it may be as follows. It is faith that is the appointed means of gaining all blessings from God. "All things are possible to him that believeth[7]." Now, at stated times, when we gather up our thoughts to pray, and draw out our peti-

[7] Mark ix. 23.

tions in an orderly and clear manner, the act of faith is likely to be stronger and more earnest; then we realize more perfectly the presence of that God whom we do not see, and Him on whom once all our sins were laid, who bore the weight of our infirmities and sicknesses once for all, that in all our troubles we might seek Him, and find grace in time of need. Then this world is more out of sight, and we more simply appropriate those blessings, which we have but to claim humbly and they are really ours.

Stated times of prayer, then, are necessary, first, as a means of making the mind sober, and the general temper more religious; secondly, as a means of exercising earnest faith, and therefore of receiving a more certain blessing in answer, than we should otherwise obtain.

Other reasons, doubtless, may be given; but these are enough, not only as containing subject for thought which may be useful to us, but besides as serving to show how wise and merciful those Divine provisions really are, which our vain minds are so apt to question. All God's commands, indeed, ought to be received at once upon faith, though we saw no reason for them. It is no excuse for a man's disobeying them even if he thinks he sees reasons against them; for God knows better than we do. But in great conde-

scension He has allowed us to see here and there His reasons for what He does and enjoins; and we should treasure up these occasional notices as memorials against the time of temptation, that when doubt and unbelief assail us, and we are perplexed at His revealed word, we may call to mind those former instances in our own experience, where, what at first seemed strange and hard, on closer consideration was found to have a wise end. Now the duty of observing stated times of private prayer is one of those concerning which we are apt to entertain the unbelieving thoughts I have been describing.

It seems to us to be a form, or at least a light matter, to observe or omit; whereas in truth, such creatures are we, there is the most close and remarkable connexion between small observances and the permanence of our chief habits and practices. It is easy to see why it is irksome; because it presses upon us and is inconvenient. It is a duty which claims our attention continually, and its irksomeness leads our hearts to rebel; and then we proceed to search for reasons to justify our own dislike of it. Nothing is more difficult than to be disciplined and regular in our religion. It is very easy to be religious by fits and starts, and to keep up our feelings by artificial stimulants; but regularity seems to trammel us, and we become impa-

tient. This is especially the case with those to whom the world is as yet new, and who can do as they please. Religion is the chief subject which meets them, which enjoins regularity; and they bear it only so far as they can make it look like things of this world, curious or changeable or exciting. Satan knows his advantage here. He perceives well enough that stated private prayer is the very emblem and safeguard of true devotion to God, as impressing on us and keeping up in us a rule of conduct. He who gives up regularity in prayer has lost a principal means of reminding himself that spiritual life is obedience to a Lawgiver, not a mere feeling or a taste Hence it is that so many persons, especially in the polished ranks of society, who are out of the way of temptation to gross vice, fall away into a mere luxurious self-indulgent devotion, which they take for religion; they reject every thing which implies self-denial, and regular prayer especially. Hence it is that others run into all kinds of enthusiastic fancies; because, by giving up set private prayer in written forms, they have lost the chief rule of their hearts. Accordingly, you will hear them exclaim against regular prayer, (which is the very medicine suited to their disease,) as a formal service, and maintain that times and places and fixed words are beneath the attention of a spiritual

Christian. And others, who are exposed to the seductions of sin, altogether fall away from the same omission. Be sure, my brethren, whoever of you is persuaded to disuse his morning and evening prayers, is giving up the armour which is to secure him against the wiles of the Devil. If you have left off the observance of them, you may fall any day!—and you will fall without notice. For a time you will go on, seeming to yourselves to be the same as before; but the Israelites might as well hope to lay in a stock of manna as you of grace. You pray God for your daily bread, your bread day by day; and if you have not prayed for it this morning, it will profit you little that you prayed for it yesterday. You did then pray and you obtained,—but not a supply for two days. When you have given over the practice of stated prayer, you gradually become weaker without knowing it. Samson did not know he had lost his strength till the Philistines came upon him; you will think yourselves the men you used to be, till suddenly your adversary will come furiously upon you, and you will as suddenly fall. You will be able to make little or no resistance. This is the path which leads to death. Men first leave off private prayer; then they neglect the due observance of the Lord's day (which is a stated service of the same kind;) then they gradually

let slip from their minds the very idea of obedience to a fixed eternal law; then they actually allow themselves in things which their conscience condemns; then they lose the direction of their conscience, which being ill used, at length refuses to direct them. And thus, being left by their true inward guide, they are obliged to take another guide, their reason, which by itself knows little or nothing about religion; then this their blind reason forms a system of right or wrong for them, as well as it can, flattering to their own desires, and presumptuous where it is not actually corrupt. No wonder such a scheme contradicts Scripture, which it is soon found to do; not that they are certain to perceive this themselves: they often do not know it, and think themselves still believers in the Gospel, while they maintain doctrines which the Gospel condemns. But sometimes they perceive that their system is contrary to Scripture; and then, instead of giving it up, they give up Scripture, and profess themselves unbelievers. Such is the course of disobedience, beginning in (apparently) slight omissions, and ending in open unbelief; and all men who walk in the broad way which leads to destruction are but in different stages of it, one more advanced than another, but all in one way. And I have spoken of it here, in order to remind you how intimately it is connected

with the neglect of set private prayer; whereas, he who is strict in the observance of prayer morning and evening, praying with his heart as well as his lips, can hardly go astray, for every morning and evening brings him a monitor to draw him back and restore him.

Beware then of the subtilty of your Enemy, who would fain rob you of your defence. Do not yield to his bad reasonings. Be on your guard especially, when you get into novel situations or circumstances, which interest and delight you; lest they throw you out of your regularity in prayer. Any thing new or unexpected is dangerous to you. Going much into mixed society, and seeing many strange persons, taking share in any pleasant amusements, reading interesting books, entering into a new line of life, forming some new acquaintance, the prospect of any worldly advantage, travelling, all these things and such like, innocent as they are in themselves, and capable of a religious use, become means of temptation if we are not on our guard. See that you are not *unsettled* by them, this is the danger; fear becoming *unsettled.* Consider that stability of mind is the chief of virtues, for it is Faith. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee[8];"

[8] Isaiah xxvi. 3.

this is the promise. But "the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked[9]." Nor to the wicked only, in our common sense of the word "wicked," but to none is there rest, who in any way leave their God, and rove after the goods of this world. Do not indulge visions of earthly good, fix your hearts on higher things, let your morning and evening thoughts be points of rest for your mind's eye, and let those thoughts be upon the narrow way, and the blessedness of heaven, and the glory and power of Christ your Saviour. Thus will you be kept from unseemly risings and fallings, and steadied in an equable way. Men in general will know nothing of this; they witness not your private prayers, and they will confuse you with the multitude they fall in with. But your friends and acquaintance will gain a light and a comfort from your example; they will see your good works, and be led to trace them to their true secret source, the influences of the Holy Ghost sought and obtained by prayer. Thus they will glorify your heavenly Father, and in imitation of you will seek Him; and He who seeth in secret, shall at length reward you openly.

[9] Isaiah lvii. 20, 21.

SERMON XIV.

FORMS OF PRIVATE PRAYER.

LUKE xi. 1.

"Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

THESE words express the natural feelings of the awakened mind, perceiving its great need of God's help, yet not understanding well what its particular wants are, or how they are to be relieved. The disciples of John the Baptist, and the disciples of Christ, waited on their respective Masters for instruction *how to pray*. It was in vain that the duty of repentance was preached to the one, and of faith to the other; in vain that God's mercies and His judgments were set before them, and their own duties; they seem to have all that was necessary for making prayers for themselves, yet they could not; their hearts were full, but they remained dumb; they could offer no petition except to *be taught* to pray; they knew the Truth, but they could not use it. So different a thing is

it to be instructed in religion, and to have so mastered it in practice that it is altogether our own.

Their need has been the need of Christians ever since. All of us in childhood, and most men ever after, require direction how to pray; and hence the use of *Forms of prayer*, which have always obtained in the Church. John taught his disciples; Christ gave the Apostles the prayer which is distinguished by the name of the *Lord's Prayer;* and after He had ascended on high, the Holy Spirit has given us excellent services of devotion by the mouth of those blessed saints, whom from time to time He has raised up to be overseers in the Church. In the words of St. Paul, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought[1];" but "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities;" and that, not only by guiding our thoughts, but by directing our words.

This, I say, is the origin of *Forms of prayer*, of which I mean to speak to-day; viz. these two undeniable truths, first, that all men have the same spiritual wants,—and, secondly, that they cannot of themselves express them.

Now it has so happened that in these latter times self-wise reasoners have arisen who have

[1] Rom. viii. 26.

questioned the use of Forms of prayer, and have thought it better to pray out of their own thoughts at random, using words which come into their minds at the time they pray. It may be right then, that we should have some reason at hand for our use of those Forms, which we have adopted because they were handed down to us. Not, as if it were not quite a *sufficient* reason for using them, that we have received them, and, (in St. Paul's words,) that "neither we nor the Churches of God have known any other custom[2]," and that the best of Christians have ever used them; for this *is* an abundantly satisfactory reason;—nor again, as if we could hope by reasons ever so good, to persuade those who inquire of us, which most likely we shall not be able to do; for a man is far gone in extravagance who deliberately denies the use of Forms, and is likely to find our reasons as difficult to receive as the practice we are defending;—so that we can only say of such men, after St. Paul's manner, "if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant," there is no help for it. But it may be useful to show you *how* reasonable the practice is, in order that you yourselves may turn it to better account; for when we know why we do a thing, we are likely (the same circumstances

[2] 1 Cor. xi. 16.

being supposed) to do it more comfortably than when we obey ignorantly.

Now, I suppose no one is in any difficulty about the use of Forms of prayer in *public* worship; for common sense almost will tell us, that when many are to pray together *as one* man, if their thoughts are to go together, they *must* agree beforehand what is to be the subject of their prayers, nay, what the *words* of their prayers, if there is to be any certainty, composure, ease, and regularity in their united devotions. To be present at extempore prayer, is to *hear prayers*. Nay, it might happen, or rather often would happen, that we did not understand what was said; and then the person praying is scarcely praying "in a tongue understanded of the people," (as our Article expresses it;) he is rather interceding *for* the people, than praying *with* them, and leading their worship. In the case, then, of *public* prayer the need of forms is evident; but it is not at first sight *so* obvious that in *private* prayer also we need use written Forms, instead of praying *extempore* (as it is called); so I proceed to show the use of them.

1. Let us bear in mind the precept of the wise man. "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth;

therefore let thy words be few [3]." Prayers framed at the moment are likely to become *irreverent*. Let us consider for a few moments before we pray, into whose presence we are entering,—the presence of God. What need have we of humble, sober, and subdued thoughts! as becomes *creatures*, sustained hourly by His bounty;—as becomes *lost sinners* who have no right to speak at all, but must submit in silence to Him who is holy;—and still more, as grateful *servants of Him* who bought us from ruin at the price of His own blood; meekly sitting at His feet like Mary to learn and to do His will, and like the penitent at the great man's feast, quietly adoring Him, and doing Him service without disturbance, washing His feet (as it were) with our tears, and anointing them with precious ointment, as having sinned much and needing a large forgiveness. Therefore, to avoid the irreverence of many or unfit words and rude half-religious thoughts, it is necessary to pray from book or memory, and not at random.

It may be objected, that this reason for using Forms proves too much; viz. that it would be wrong ever to do without them; which is an over-rigorous bond upon Christian liberty. But I reply, that reverence in our prayers will be suf-

[3] Eccles. v. 2.

ficiently secured, if at our stated seasons for prayer we make use of Forms. For thus a tone and character will be imparted to our devotion throughout the day; nay even the very petitions and ejaculations will be supplied, which we need. And much more will our souls be influenced by the power of them, at the very time we are using them; so that, should the occasion require, we shall find ourselves able to go forward naturally and soberly into such additional supplications, as are of too particular or private a nature, to admit of being written down in set words.

2. In the next place, forms of prayer are necessary to guard us against the irreverence of *wandering* thoughts. If we pray without set words (read or remembered), our minds will stray from the subject; other thoughts will cross us, and we shall pursue them; we shall lose sight of His presence whom we are addressing. This wandering of mind is in good measure prevented, under God's blessing, by Forms of prayer. Thus a chief use of them is that of *fixing the attention.*

3. Next, they are useful in securing us from the irreverence of *excited thoughts.* And here there is room for saying much; for, it so happens Forms of prayer are censured for the very circumstance about them which is their excellence. They are accused of impeding the current of de-

votion, when, in fact, that (so called) current is in itself faulty, and ought to be checked. And those persons (as might be expected) are most eager in their opposition to them, who require more than others the restraint of them. They sometimes throw their objection into the following form, which it may be worth while to consider. They say, "If a man is in earnest, he will soon find words; there is no need of a set Form of prayer. And if he is not in earnest, a Form can do him no good." Now that a man who is in earnest will soon find words, is true or not true, according to what is meant by being in earnest. It is true that at certain times a strong emotion, grief or joy, remorse or fear, our religious feelings outrun and leave behind them any Form of words. In such cases not only is there no *need* of Forms of prayer, but it is perhaps impossible to write *Forms* of prayer for Christians agitated by such feelings. For each man feels in his own way,—perhaps no two men exactly alike;—and we can no more write down *how* men ought to pray at such times, than we can give rules how they should weep or be merry. The better men they are, of course the better they will pray in such a trying time; but you cannot make them better; they must be left to themselves. And, though good men have before now set down in writing Forms of prayer

for persons so circumstanced, these were doubtless meant rather as patterns and helps, or as admonitions and (if so be) quietings of the agitated mind, than as prayers which it was expected would be used literally and entirely in their detail. As a general rule, Forms of prayer should not be written in strong and impassioned language; but should be calm, composed, and short. Our Saviour's own prayer is our model in this respect. How few are its petitions! how soberly expressed! how reverently! and at the same time how deep are they, and how comprehensive!—I readily grant, then, that there *are* times when the heart outruns any written words; as the jailor cried out, "What shall I do to be saved?" Nay, rather I would maintain that set words should not attempt to imitate the impetuous workings to which all minds are subject at times in this world of change, (and therefore religious minds in the number,) lest one should seem to encourage them.

Still the question is not at all settled; granting there *are* times when a thankful or a wounded heart bursts through all Forms of prayer, yet these are not *frequent*. To be excited is not the *ordinary* state of the mind, but the extraordinary, the now and then state. Nay, more than this, it *ought not* to be the common state of the mind; and if we are encouraging within us this excite-

ment, this unceasing rush and alternation of feelings, and think that this, and this only, is being in earnest in religion, we are harming our minds, and (in one sense) I may even say, grieving the peaceful Spirit of God, which would silently and tranquilly work His Divine work in our hearts. This, then, is an especial *use* of Forms of prayer, *when* we are in earnest, as we ought always to be, viz. to keep us from irreverent earnestness, to still emotion, to calm us, to remind us what and where we are, to lead us to a purer and serener temper, and to that deep unruffled love of God and man, which is really the fulfilling of the law, and the perfection of human nature.

Then, again, as to the usefulness of Forms if we are *not* in earnest, this also is true or not, as we may take it. For there are degrees of earnestness. Let us recollect, the power of praying, being a habit, must be acquired, like all other habits, by practice. In order at length to pray well, we must begin by praying ill, since ill is all we can do. Is not this plain? Who, in the case of any other work, would wait till he could do it perfectly, before he tried it? The idea is absurd. Yet those who object to Forms of prayer on the ground just mentioned, fall into this strange error. If, indeed, we could pray and praise God, like the Angels, we might have no need of Forms

of prayer; but Forms are to teach those who pray poorly to pray better. They are helps to our devotion, as teaching us what to pray for, and how, as St. John and our Lord taught their disciples; and, doubtless, even the *best* of us prays *but* poorly, and *needs* the help of them. However, the persons I speak of, think that prayer is nothing else but the bursting forth of strong feeling, not the action of a habit, but an emotion, and therefore, *of course* to such men the very notion of *learning* to pray seems absurd. But this indulgence of emotion is in truth founded on a mistake, as I have already said.

4. Further, forms are useful to *help our memory*, and to set before us at once, completely, and in order, what we have to pray for. It does not follow, that when the heart is really full of the thought of God, and alive to the reality of things unseen, then it is easiest to pray. Rather, the deeper insight we have into His Majesty and our innumerable wants, the less we shall be able to draw out our thoughts into words. The publican could only say, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" this was enough for his *acceptance;* but to offer such a scanty service was not to exercise the *gift* of prayer, the privilege of a ransomed and exalted son of God. He whom Christ has illuminated with His grace, is heir of all things. He has an

interest in the world's multitude of matters. He has a boundless sphere of duties within and without him. He has a glorious prospect before him. The saints shall hereafter judge the world; and shall they not *here* take cognizance of its doings? are they not in one sense counsellors and confidential servants of their Lord, intercessors at the throne of grace, the secret agents by and for whom He guides His high providence, and carries on the nations to their doom? And in their own persons is forgiveness merely and acceptance (extreme blessings as these are) the scope of their desires? else might they be content with the publican's prayer. Are they not rather bidden to go on to perfection, to use the Spirit given them, to enlarge and purify their own hearts, and to draw out the nature of man into the fulness of its capabilities after the image of the Son of God? And for the thought of all these objects at once who is sufficient? Whose mind is not overpowered by the view of its own immense privilege, so as eagerly to seek for words of prayer and intercession carefully composed according to the number and the nature of the various petitions it has to offer? so that he who prays without plan, is in fact losing a great part of the privilege, with which his Baptism has gifted him.

5. And further, the use of a Form as a help to

the memory is still more obvious, when we take into account the engagements of this world with which most men are surrounded. The cares and businesses of life press upon us with a reality which we cannot overlook. Shall we trust the matters of the next world to the chance thoughts of our own minds, which come this moment, and go the next, and may not be at hand when the time of employing them arrives, like unreal visions, having no substance and no permanence? This world is Satan's efficacious Form, it is the instrument through which he spreads out in order and attractiveness his many snares; and these doubtless will engross us, unless we also give form to the spiritual objects towards which we pray and labour. How short are the seasons which most men have to give to prayer? Before they can collect their memories and minds, their leisure is almost over, even if they have the power to dismiss the thoughts of this world, which just before engaged them. Now Forms of prayer do this *for* them. They keep the ground occupied, that Satan may not encroach upon the seasons of devotion. They are a standing memorial, to which we can recur as to a temple of God, finding every thing in order for our worship as soon as we go into it, though the time allotted us at morning and evening be ever so circumscribed.

6. And this use of Forms in prayer becomes great, beyond power of estimating, in the case of those multitudes of men, who, after going on well for a while, fall into sin. If even conscientious men require continual aids to be reminded of the next world, how extreme is the need of those who try to forget it! It cannot be denied, fearful as it is to reflect upon it, that far the greater number of those who come to manhood, for a while (at least) desert the God who has redeemed them; and then, if in their earlier years they have learned and used no prayers or psalms by which to worship Him, what is to keep them from blotting altogether from their minds the thought of religion? But here it is that the Forms of the Church have ever served her children, both to restrain them in their career of sin, and to supply them with ready utterance on their repentance. Chance words and phrases of her services adhere to their memories, rising up in moments of temptation or of trouble, to check or to recover them. And hence it happens, that in the most irreligious companies a distinction is said to be observable between those who have had the opportunity of using our public Forms in their youth, and those whose religious impressions have not been thus happily fortified; so that, amid their most reckless mirth, and most daring pretence of profligacy, a

sort of secret reverence has attended the wanderers, restraining them from that impiety and profaneness in which the others have tried to conceal from themselves the guilt and peril of their doings.

And again on their repentance, (should they be favoured with so high a grace,) what friends do they seem to find amid their gloom in the words they learned in their boyhood,—a kindly voice, aiding them to say what they otherwise would not know how to say, guiding and composing their minds upon those objects of faith which they ought to look to, but cannot find of themselves, and so (as it were) interceding for them with the power of the blessed Spirit, while nature can but groan and travail in pain! Sinners as they are by their own voluntary misdeeds, and with a prospect of punishment before them, enlightened by but few and faint gleams of hope, what shall keep them from feverish restlessness, and all the extravagance of fear, what shall soothe them, into a fixed resigned waiting for their Judge, and such lowly efforts to obey Him, however poorly, as become a penitent, but those words, long buried in their minds, and now rising again as if with the life of their uncorrupted boyhood? It requires no great experience of sick beds to verify the truth of this statement. Blessed, indeed, is the power of

those formularies, which thus succeed in throwing a sinner for a while out of himself, and in bringing before him the scenes of his youth, his guardian friends now long departed, their ways and their teaching, their pious services, and their peaceful end; and though all this is an excitement, and lasts but for a season, yet, if improved, it may be converted into an habitual contemplation of persons and deeds which now live to God, though removed hence,—if improved by acting upon it, it will become an abiding motive to seek the world to come, an abiding persuasion, winning him from the works of darkness, and raising him to the humble hope of future acceptance with his Saviour and Judge.

7. Such is the force of association in undoing the evil of past years, and recalling us to the innocence of children. Nor is this all we may gain from the prayers we use, nor are penitent sinners the only persons who can profit by it. Let us recollect for how long a period our prayers have been the standard Forms of devotion in the Church of Christ, and we shall gain a fresh reason for loving them, and a fresh source of comfort in using them. I know different persons will feel differently here, according to their different turn of mind; yet surely there are few of us, if we dwelt on the thought, but would feel it a privilege

to use, as we do, (for instance, in the Lord's Prayer) the very petitions which Christ spoke. He gave the prayer and used it. His Apostles used it; all the Saints ever since have used it. When we use it we seem to join company with them. Who does not think himself brought nearer to any celebrated man in history, by seeing his house, or his furniture, or his handwriting, or the very books that were his? Thus does the Lord's Prayer bring us near to Christ, and to His disciples in every age. No wonder, then, that in past times good men thought this form of prayer so sacred, that it seemed to them impossible to say it too often, as if some especial grace went with the use of it. Nor *can* we use it too often; it contains in itself a sort of plea for Christ's listening to us; we cannot, so that we keep our thoughts fixed on its petitions, and use our minds as well as our lips when we repeat it. And what is true of the Lord's Prayer, is in its measure true of most of those prayers which our Church teaches us to use. It is true of the Psalms also, and of the Creeds; all of which have become sacred, from the memory of saints departed who have used them, and whom we hope one day to meet in heaven.

One caution I give in conclusion as to using these thoughts. Beware lest your religion be one

of sentiment merely, not of practice. Men may speak in a high imaginative way of the ancient Saints and the Holy Apostolic Church, without making the fervour or refinement of their devotion bear upon their conduct. Many a man likes to be religious in graceful language; he loves religious tales and hymns, yet is never the better Christian for all this. The works of every day, these are the tests of our glorious contemplations, whether or not they shall be available to our salvation; and he who does one deed of obedience for Christ's sake, let him have no imagination and no fine feeling, is a better man, and returns to his home justified rather than the most eloquent speaker, and the most sensitive hearer, of the glory of the Gospel, if such men do not practise up to their knowledge.

SERMON XV.

RELIANCE ON RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES.

LUKE xvii. 10.

"When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do."

IF when we have done all, we are unprofitable, what are we when we have done but a part? and then again, what are we, if that part itself be defective, and defiled with evil? There is no sort of question then, that if *reason* is to be judge, there can be no boasting towards God even on the part of His most matured saints and exactest servants. There can, I say, be no boasting, because whatever we do is the fruit of His grace, and because we do very little, and because, in spite of His grace, what we do is infected with sin, and because even if we did all, we should be doing no more than we are bound to do. I cannot conceive any one who fairly gave his mind to consider the matter, what-

ever weight he might give to this or that consideration in particular, however disposed he might be to exalt his natural powers, or his actual services, not coming after all to this conclusion,—to this conclusion in the judgment of *reason.*

And yet, it will be said, there are many persons in the world who are well pleased with what they are and what they do, who are well satisfied with themselves, who think themselves in so fair a way for attaining heaven, that they need not give themselves any extraordinary trouble about it; who are what is commonly called self-righteous. Now I do not allow that those *are* self-righteous necessarily who are *called* so, because there is among us much unfair and harsh judging of the feelings and motives of others; but still after all there *is* a state of mind which is self-righteous,—I mean a state of mind in which a person has no serious fears of future judgment, and is well satisfied with himself. Certainly; but this is no objection to what I have been saying, for you will find this to arise from persons *not* thinking of God. What I said just now was, that no one who thinks seriously of Almighty God and himself, can pride himself on his services; but this is what men in general cannot bring themselves steadily to do. Self-righteous men are men who live to the world, and do not think of God. They do not think of

judgment as sure to come one day or another. They have no fears for the future, because they have no prospect about the future. They are contented with the present, and with themselves, because they live in what is visible and tangible, and do not measure themselves by what is unseen and spiritual. "They, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise . . . for not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth[1]." Worldly men are self-righteous men.

Another class of self-righteous men are they who do not believe in the Divinity and Atonement of Christ. These men, again, do not really measure themselves by a heavenly standard and by God's judgment; they measure themselves merely by their own conscience, and their conscience is dark and blind. They have low and narrow views of duty.

Once more, men who fasten their minds on any particular object of religion short of God, become self-righteous, for they narrow the field of duty, and make this object the measure of it. Hence, whether men make benevolent schemes and exertions to be the whole of their religion, or ceremo-

[1] 2 Cor. x. 12. 18.

nial observances, or maintenance of true doctrine, or obedience to any other portion of God's law, they are insensibly led to be satisfied with their own doings, both because of the vivid consciousness which this prominent object creates in them, that religion is their chief employment, and because of the persuasion which readily comes on them that they duly act up to it. Such was the case of the Pharisee in the parable. And if this is true in the case of objects and observances good in themselves, much more will it happen when men place their religion in such as are not so;—the main fault in all cases being this, that the persons in question, instead of thinking anxiously of God and His law, think only of a portion of it, which they have of themselves set apart, and make it a sort of idol. On the whole, then, what I have said is true, that in spite of the existence of self-righteous men in fact, no one can really think himself meritorious in God's sight, who comes seriously to consider himself and God, apparent exceptions being those in which persons do not think duly of either.

This I consider to be the real state of the case; however, the popular view of spiritual pride or self-righteousness is this, that those men are self-righteous, or in great danger of being so, who come often to church, and are diligent in their

moral duties. Now this is the point in which I consider that there is a great deal of unfair and uncharitable judgment among us, persons being said to be satisfied with themselves who are really not so. However, our business is, when the world blames and slanders us, not to be vexed at it, but rather to consider whether there is any foundation for it, any truth at bottom, though there be exaggeration and mistake. I conceive a person may always gain good to his own soul, gain instruction and useful suggestions, by the mistakes of the world about him. Now then let us consider, from this hint given us by ignorant and prejudiced men, whether we, who are blessed so frequently as we are with the ordinances of the Gospel, with the privilege of Prayer and Holy Communion, are or not in any special danger of spiritual pride, or as of late years it has been called, self-righteousness.

Now of course there *is* a danger of persons becoming self-satisfied, in being regular and exemplary in devotional exercises; there is danger, which others have not, of their so attending to them as to forget that they have other duties to attend to. I mean the danger, of which I was just now speaking, of having their attention drawn off from other duties by their very attention to this duty in particular. And what is still most

likely of all, persons who are regular in their devotions may be visited with passing thoughts every now and then, that they are thereby better than other people; and these occasional thoughts may secretly tend to make them self-satisfied, without their being aware of it, till they have a latent habit of self-conceit and contempt of others. Such cases certainly are possible or probable; in none of them do persons actually rely on their merit, or boastfully plead their services in God's sight; but still those services do seem to be a snare to them, leading some of them to forget how far they are from perfection on the whole, and how much they sin; leading others to forget that they have other duties also to do, and encouraging others in a quiet, unobtrusive self-complacency, while they still acknowledge themselves to be sinners. What is done statedly forces itself upon the mind, impresses the memory and imagination, and seems to be a *substitute* for other duties; and what is contained in definite outward acts has a completeness and tangible form about it, which is likely to *satisfy* the mind. I do not deny then there is some danger, lest persons who are frequent in devotional services should be as the Pharisees, do nothing else, and be well contented that they do so much. Accordingly you may hear illnatured persons, or scoffers, say severe things against those

who are strict in their religious observances, as if in other respects they were *worse* than others, or were hypocritical. All this is but the language of the world, and not to be believed; still I do not deny that persons who are frequent in prayers and other religious exercises should be jealous over themselves, and not take for granted they are going on right, particularly since their very strictness is a call on them for a more exact observance of their other duties. But all this is quite a different matter, from such danger being an *objection* to observing devotional duties. If there is a danger, let it be watched and prevented, but let not the observance be omitted: there are few things which are not dangerous. All things may be perverted and abused. The great lesson set before us in the Gospel is to use the world without abusing it, and in like manner to use *God's mercies* without abusing them. If frequent attendance at the Lord's Table or at prayers leads, unless we are watchful, to spiritual pride, our duty is *to be* watchful, not to omit attendance.

However, I do not think, after all, that there *is* any very great danger to a serious mind in the frequent use of these great privileges. Indeed, it were a strange thing to say that the simple performance of what God has told us to do *can* do harm to any but those who have not the love of God in their

hearts, and to such persons all things are harmful; *they* pervert every thing into evil. It is impossible (praised be God!) that earnest and humble minds should derive anything from Christ's ordinances but those high and ineffable blessings which are lodged in them. Christ's gifts are not snares, but mercies. Let us then see how this danger, which I have allowed to exist in devotional observances, is counteracted in the case of serious minds.

1. Now, first, the evil in question (supposing it to exist) is singularly adapted to be its own corrective. It can only do us injury when we do not know its existence. When a man knows and feels the intrusion of self-satisfied and self-complacent thoughts, here is something at once to humble him and destroy that complacency. To know of a weakness is always humbling; now humility is the very grace needed here. To know we are passionate, or slothful, or severe, is indeed the first step towards removing such defects, but does not directly tend to remove them. Knowledge of our indolence does not encourage us to exertion, but induces despondence; but to know we are self-satisfied is a direct blow to self-satisfaction. There is no satisfaction in perceiving that we are self-satisfied. No one can be self-righteous who knows and laments his proud thoughts; but a person may be slothful who knows and laments that he

is slothful. Here then is one great safeguard against our priding ourselves on our observances. Evil thoughts do us no harm, if recognized, if repelled, if protested against by the indignation and self-reproach of the mind. It is when we do not discern them, when we admit them, when we cherish them, that they ripen into principles. And if this is true of all bad thoughts, much more is it of those now spoken of, which humble us on their detection as much as they elate us on their first entrance. I do not deny that the intrusion of such vain and foolish thoughts takes off from the comfort of our devotion, when they occur; but that is another matter. The question is not about comfort, but about mischief. It is no good reason for giving over devotional exercises, that we have not all the comfort from them which we might have.

2. But again, if religious persons are troubled with proud thoughts about their own excellence and strictness, I think it is only when they are young in their religion, and that the trial will wear off; and that for many reasons. I would not indeed speak with undue decision on such a point, —every one has his particular temptations; yet one should hardly think that any but minds very young in the faith, minds to whom religion was a new thing, would pride themselves on their performances or rest upon them,—I mean, would

even have the temptation to do so; for surely it does not require much keenness of spiritual sight to see how very far our best is from what it should be. Satisfaction with our own doings, as I have said, arises from fixing the mind on some *one part* of our duty, instead of attempting the whole of it. In proportion as we narrow the field of our duties, we become able to compass them. Men who pursue only this duty or only that duty, are in danger of self-righteousness;—zealots, bigots, devotees, men of the world, sectarians, are for this reason self-righteous. For the same reason, persons beginning a religious course are self-righteous, though they often think themselves just the reverse. They consider, perhaps, all religion to lie in confessing themselves sinners, and having warm feelings concerning their redemption and justification,—in having what they consider faith; and, as all this is fulfilled in them, they come to think they have attained and are sure of heaven; and all because they have so very contracted a notion of the range of God's commandments, of the rounds of that ladder which reaches from earth to heaven. And in the same way, I admit that religious persons, who for one reason or another are led to begin a greater strictness than hitherto in their devotional observances, in attending prayers or the Lord's Supper, or in fasting, or in almsgiv-

ing, are, on beginning, in some danger of becoming self-satisfied; for the same reason,—as fixing their minds on one certain portion of their duty and becoming excited about *it*; and this the more, inasmuch as the observances in question are something definite and precise; and on the other hand are evidently neglected by others.

But the remedy of the evil is obvious, and one which, as it will surely be applied by every religious person, because he *is* religious, will, under God's grace, effect in no long time a cure. Try to do your *whole* duty, and you will soon cease to be well-pleased with your religious state. If you are in earnest, you will try to add to your faith virtue; and the more you effect, the less will you seem to yourself to do. On the other hand, attend prayer and the Holy Eucharist without corresponding strictness in other matters; and it is plain what will follow, from the nature of the human mind, without going to more solemn considerations. The more you neglect your daily, domestic, relative, temporal duties, the more you will prize yourself on your (I cannot call them religious, your) formal, ceremonial, observances. Thus it is plain that self-satisfaction is the feeling either of a beginner, or of a very defective and negligent Christian.

3. But this is not all. Certainly this objection, that devotional practices, such as prayer, fasting,

and communicating, tend to self-righteousness, is the objection of those, or at least is just what the objection of those would be, who never attempted them. Men speak as if it was the easiest thing in the world to fast and pray, and do austerities, and as if such courses were the most seductive, easiest, pleasantest, methods of attaining heaven. I do not deny that there are certain states of society, certain ages and countries, in which they are much easier than in others; but this is true of all duties. We, for instance, of this day, find *manliness* and *candour* as easy as some eastern nations might find fasting and meditation. But that is not the question. We are what we are,—Englishmen; and for us who are active in our habits and social in our tempers, fasting and meditation have no such great attractions, and are of no such easy observance. When then an objector fears lest such observances should make him self-righteous, were he to attempt them, I do think he is over-anxious, over-confident in his own power to fulfil them; he trusts too much in his own strength already, and, depend on it, to attempt them would make him less self-righteous, not more so. He need not be so very fearful of being too good; he may assure himself that the smallest of his Lord's commandments are to a spiritual mind solemn, arduous, and inexhaustible. Is it an easy

thing to pray? It *is* easy to wait for a rush of feelings, and then to let our petitions be borne upon them; and never to attempt the duty till then; but it is not at all easy to be in the habit day after day and hour after hour, in all frames of mind, and under all outward circumstances, to bring before God a calm collected awakened soul. It is not at all easy to keep the mind from wandering in prayer, to keep out all intrusive thoughts about other things. It is not at all easy to realize what we are about, who is before us, what we are seeking, and what our state is. It is not at all easy to throw off the world and to understand that God and Christ hear us, that Saints and Angels are standing by us, and the devil desiring to have us. What indeed *is* after all meant, by asserting that regular and stated prayers are dangerous to a sensitive and serious mind? They are dangerous to the blind and formal; but so all things are; but where is the really serious mind that will say it is easy to take delight in stated prayer, to attend to it duly? Is not at the best our delight in it transient, and our attention irregular? Is all this satisfactory and elating?

And so again of austerities; there may be persons so constituted by nature as to take pleasure in mortifications for their own sake, and to be able to practise them adequately; and *they* certainly

are in danger of practising them for their own sakes, not through faith, and of becoming spiritually proud in consequence; but surely it is idle to speak of this as an ordinary danger.

And so again a religious mind has a perpetual source of humiliation from *this* consciousness also, viz. how far his *actual conduct in the world* falls short of the profession which his devotional observances involve. It is not a pleasant, not an inspiring, not an elating reflection, to think that you are making a profession which you must in some measure dishonour by your daily imperfections. There is nothing flattering and soothing in the thought that you are inviting the world to criticize you, and preparing it to expect more than it will find; to say nothing of the more bitter feelings which the professions and the vows of obedience, made in Church and broken in the world, cost you when thought of in God's sight. Alas! is it at all a comfort to add to the catalogue of those sins which we must answer for in the Last Day? yet this we must do, or at least run the risk of it, if we attempt those services which some persons would persuade us necessarily tend to self-righteousness.

4. But, after all, what is this shrinking from responsibility, which fears to be obedient lest it should fail, but cowardice and ingratitude? What

is it but the very conduct of the Israelites, who, when Almighty God bade them encounter their enemies and so gain Canaan, feared the sons of Anak because they were giants? To fear to do our duty lest we should become self-righteous in doing it, is to be wiser than God; it is to distrust Him; it is to do and to feel like the unprofitable servant who hid his Lord's talent, and then laid the charge of his sloth on his Lord, as being a hard and austere man. At best we are unprofitable servants when we have done all; but if we are but unprofitable when we do our best to be profitable, what are we, when we fear to do our best, but unworthy to be His servants at all? No! to *fear* the *consequences* of obedience is to be worldlywise, and to go by reason when we are bid go by faith. Let us dare to do His commandments, leaving to Him to bring us through who has imposed them. Let us risk dangers which cannot in truth be realized, however they threaten, since He has bid us risk them, and will protect us in them. Let us bear, what probably will befal us, the assaults of Satan, the sins of infirmity, the remains of the old Adam, involuntary mistakes, the smarting of our wounds, and the dejection and desolateness ensuing, if it be His will. He has promised to lead us safely heavenward, in spite of all things being against us; He will keep

us from all wilful sin; but the infirmities which beset us, our ignorances, waywardnesses, weaknesses, and misconceptions, these He still ordains should try us and humble us, should move in us vexation of spirit and self-abasement, and should bring us day by day to the foot of His Cross for pardon. Let us then compose ourselves, and bear a firm and courageous heart. Let us steel ourselves, not against self-reproach and self-hatred, but against unmanly fear. Let us feel what we really are,—sinners attempting great things, and succeeding at best only so far as to show that we do attempt them. Let us simply obey God's will, whatever may befal; whether it tend to elate us or to depress us, what is that to us? He can turn all things to our eternal good. He can bless and sanctify even our infirmities. He can lovingly chastise us, if we be puffed up, and he can cheer us when we despond. He can and will exalt us the more we afflict ourselves; and we shall afflict ourselves the more, in true humbleness of mind, the more we really obey Him. Blessed are they who in any matter do His will; and they are thrice blessed who, in what they are doing, are also interesting themselves, as in the case which has been under our consideration, in His special sacramental promises. Blessed indeed are they, who, while obeying God, are seeking Christ; who,

while they do a duty, receive a privilege; who commemorate His death because He bids them, and while they do so gain the virtue of it in the commemoration; who live in Him, both in the thought of Him and the possession of Him; who glory in Him who died for them, and was buried, and rose again, and now lives in their hearts; who are willing to take their part with Him, in suffering as in joy; who willingly associate themselves in that Mysterious Communion which He offers them, and which, though it brings glory in the end, brings suffering and affliction at present,—which makes them at present in a special way heirs of tears and pain and disappointment and reproach, heirs of special trials which may come upon them though they live in the most peaceful times, which may come without the world perceiving that they differ in their lot from other men,—trials which work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, and which in the present world are recompensed by the faith, humility, patience, and gentleness resulting from them.

SERMON XVI.

SINS OF IGNORANCE AND WEAKNESS.

HEBREWS x. 22.

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

AMONG the reasons which may be assigned for the observance of prayer at stated times, there is one which is very obvious, and yet perhaps is not so carefully remembered and acted upon as it should be. I mean the necessity of sinners cleansing themselves from time to time of the ever-accumulating guilt which loads their consciences. We are ever sinning; and though Christ has died once for all to release us from our penalty, yet we are not pardoned once for all, but according as, and whenever each of us supplicates for the gift. By the prayer of faith we appropriate it; but only for the time, not for ever. Guilt is again contracted, and must be

again repented of and washed away. We cannot by one act of faith establish ourselves for ever after in the favour of God. It is going beyond His will to be impatient for a final acquittal, when we are bid ask only for our *daily* bread. We are still so far in the condition of the Israelites; and though we do not offer sacrifice or observe the literal washings of the Law, yet we still require the periodical renewal of those blessings which were formerly conveyed in their degree by the Mosaic rites; and though we gain far more excellent gifts from God than the Jews did, and by more spiritual ordinances, yet means of approaching Him we still need, and continual means to keep us in the justification in which baptism first placed us. Of this the text reminds us. It is addressed to Christians, to the regenerate; yet so far from their regeneration having cleansed them once for all, they are bid ever to sprinkle the blood of Christ upon their consciences, and renew (as it were) their baptism, and so continually appear before the presence of Almighty God.

Let us now endeavour to realize a truth, which few of us will be disposed to dispute as far as words go.

1. First consider our present condition as shown us in Scripture. Christ has not changed this

though He has died; it is as it was from the beginning,—I mean our actual state as men. We have Adam's nature in the same sense as if redemption had not come to the world. It *has* come to all the world, but the world is not changed thereby as a whole,—that change is not a work done and over in Christ. We are changed *one by one;* the race of man is what it ever was, guilty;—what it was before Christ came; with the same evil passions, the same slavish will. The history of redemption, if it is to be effectual, must begin from the beginning with every individual of us, and be carried on through our own life. It is not a work done ages before we were born. We cannot profit by the work of a Saviour, though He be the Blessed Son of God, so as to be saved thereby without our own working; for we are moral agents, we have a will of our own, and Christ must be formed in us, and turn us from darkness to light, if God's gracious purpose, fulfilled upon the cross, is to be in our case more than a name, an abused, wasted privilege. Thus the world, viewed as in God's sight, can never become wiser or more enlightened than it has been. We cannot mount upon the labours of our forefathers. We have the same nature that man ever had, and we must begin from the point man

ever began from, and work out our salvation in the same slow, persevering manner.

(1.) When this is borne in mind, how important the Jewish law becomes to us Christians! important in itself, over and above all references contained in it to that Gospel which it introduced. To this day it fulfils its original purpose of impressing upon man his great guilt and feebleness. Those legal sacrifices and purifications which are now all done away, are still evidence to us of a fact which the Gospel has not annulled,—our corruption. Let no one lightly pass over the Book of Leviticus, and say it only contains the ceremonial of a national law. Let no one study it merely with a critic's eye, satisfied with connecting it in a nicely-arranged system with the Gospel, as though it contained prophecy only. No; it speaks to us. Are we better than the Jews? is our nature less unbelieving, sensual, or proud than theirs? Surely man is at all times the same being, as even the philosophers tell us. And if so, that minute ceremonial of the Law presents us with a picture of *our* daily life. It impressively testifies to our continual sinning, by suggesting that an expiation is needful in all the most trivial circumstances of our conduct; and that it is at our peril if we go on carelessly and

thoughtlessly, trusting to our having been once accepted,—whether in baptism,—or (as we think) at a certain season of repentance, or (as we may fancy) at the very time of the death of Christ, (as if then the whole race of man were really and at once pardoned and exalted,)—or (worse still) if we profanely doubt that man has ever fallen under a curse, and trust idly in the mercy of God without a feeling of the true misery and infinite danger of sin.

Consider the ceremony observed on the great day of atonement, and you will see what was the sinfulness of the Israelites, and therefore of all mankind, in God's sight. The High Priest was taken to represent the holiest person of the whole world. The nation itself was holy above the rest of the world; from it a holy tribe was selected; from the holy tribe, a holy family; and from that family, a holy person. This was the High Priest, who was thus set apart as the choice specimen of the whole human race; yet even he was not allowed, under pain of death, to approach even the mercy-seat of God, except once a year; nor then in his splendid robes, nor without sacrifices for the sins of himself and the people, the blood of which he carried with him into the holy place.

Or consider the sacrifices necessary according

to the Law for sins of ignorance[1]; or again, for the mere touching any thing which the Law pronounced unclean, or for bodily disease[2], and hence learn how sinful our ordinary thoughts and deeds must be, represented to us as they are, by these outward ceremonial transgressions. Not even their thanksgiving might the Israelites offer without an offering of blood to cleanse it; for our corruption is not merely in this act or that, but in our *nature*.

(2.) Next, to pass from the Jewish law, you will observe that God tells us expressly in the history of the fall of Adam, what the legal ceremonies implied; that it *is* our very nature which is sinful. Herein is the importance of the doctrine of original sin. It is very humbling, and as such the only true introduction to the preaching of the Gospel. Men can without trouble be brought to confess that they sin, i. e. that they commit sins. They know well enough they are not perfect; nay, that they do nothing in the best manner. But they do not like to be told that the race from which they proceed is degenerate. Even the indolent have pride here. They think they *can* do their duty, *only do not choose to do it*; they like to believe, (though strangely indeed, for

[1] Levit. iv. [2] Levit. v. 2. 6. xiv. 1—32.

they condemn themselves while they believe it,) they like to believe that they do not want assistance. A man must be far gone in degradation, and has lost even that false independence of mind which is often a substitute for real religion in leading to exertion, who, while living in sin, steadily and contentedly holds the opinion that he is born *for* sin. And much more do the industrious and active dislike to have it forced upon their minds, that do what they will, they have the taint of corruption about all their doings and imaginings. We know how ashamed men are of being low born, or discreditably connected. This is the sort of shame forced upon every son of Adam. "Thy first father hath sinned:" this is the legend on our forehead which even the sign of the Cross does no more than blot out, leaving the mark of it. This is our shame; but I notice it here, not so much as a humbling thought, as with a view of pressing upon your consciences the necessity of appearing before God at stated seasons, in order to put aside the continually-renewed guilt of your nature. Who will dare go on day after day in neglect of earnest prayer, and the Holy Communion, while each day brings its own fearful burden, coming as if spontaneously springing from our very nature, but not got rid of without deliberate and direct acts of faith in

the Great Sacrifice which has been set forth for its removal?

(3.) Further, look into your own souls, my brethren, and see if you cannot discern some part of the truth of the Scripture statement, which I have been trying to set before you. Recollect the bad thoughts of various kinds which come into your minds like darts; for these will be some evidence to you of the pollution and odiousness of your nature. True, they proceed from your adversary, the Devil; and the very circumstance of your experiencing them is in itself no proof of your being sinful, for even the Son of God, your Saviour, suffered from the temptation of them. But you will scarcely deny that they are received by you so freely and heartily, as to show that Satan tempts you through your nature, not against it. Again, let them be ever so external in their first coming, do you not make them your own? Do you not detain them? or do you impatiently and indignantly shake them off? Even if you reject them, still do they not answer Satan's purpose in inflaming your mind at the instant, and so evidence that the matter of which it is composed is corruptible? Do you not, for instance, dwell on the thought of wealth and splendour till you covet these temporal blessings? or do you not suffer yourselves, though for a while,

to be envious, or discontented, or angry, or vain, or impure, or proud? Ah! who can estimate the pollution hence, of one single day; the pollution of touching merely that dead body of sin which we put off indeed at our baptism, but which is tied about us while we live here, and is the means of our Enemy's assaults upon us! The taint of death is upon us, and surely we shall be stifled by the encompassing plague, unless God from day to day vouchsafes to make us clean.

2. Again, reflect on the *habits* of sin which we superadded to our evil nature before we turned to God. Here is another source of continual defilement. Instead of checking the bad principles within us, perhaps we indulged them for years; and they truly had their fruit unto death. Then Adam's sin increased, and multiplied itself within us; there was a change, but it was for the worse, not for the better; and the new nature we gained, far from being spiritual, was twofold more the child of hell than that with which we were born. So when, at length, we turned back into a better course, what a complicated work lay before us, to unmake ourselves! And however long we have laboured at it, still how much unconscious, unavoidable sin, the result of past transgression, is thrown out from our hearts day by day in the energy of our thinking and acting! Thus, through

the sins of our youth, the power of the flesh is exerted against us, as a second creative principle of evil, aiding the malice of the Devil; Satan from without,—and our hearts from within, not passive merely and kindled by temptation, but *devising* evil, and speaking hard things against God with articulate voice, whether we will or not! Thus do past years rise up against us in present offences; gross inconsistencies show themselves in our character; and much need have we continually to implore God to forgive us our past transgressions, which still live in spite of our repentance, and act of themselves vigorously against our better mind, feebly influenced by that younger principle of faith, by which we fight against them.

3. Further, consider how many sins are involved in our obedience, I may say from the mere necessity of the case; that is, from not having that more vigorous and clear-sighted faith which would enable us accurately to discern and closely to follow the way of life. The case of the Jews will exemplify what I mean. There were points of God's perfect Law which were not urged upon their acceptance, because it was foreseen that they would not be able to receive them as they really should be received, or to bring them home practically to their minds, and obey them simply and

truly. We, Christians, with the same evil hearts as the Jews had, and most of us as uniformed in holy practice, have, nevertheless, a perfect Law. We are bound to take and use all the precepts of the New Testament, though it stands to reason that many of them are, in matter of fact, quite above the comprehension of most of us. I am speaking of the actual state of the case, and will not go aside to ask why or under what circumstances God was pleased to change His mode of dealing with man. But so it is; the Minister of Christ has to teach his sinful people a perfect obedience, and does not know how to set about it, or how to insist on any precept, so as to secure it from being misunderstood and misapplied. He sees men are acting upon low motives and views, and finds it impossible to raise their minds all at once, however clear his statements of the Truth. He feels that their good deeds might be done in a much better manner. There are numberless small circumstances about their mode of doing things which offend him, as implying poverty of faith, superstition, and contracted carnal notions. He is obliged to leave them to themselves with the hope that they may improve generally, and outgrow their present feebleness; and is often perplexed whether to praise or blame them. So is it with all of us, Ministers as well

as people; it is so with the most advanced of Christians while in the body, and God sees it. What a source of continual defilement is here; not an omission merely of what might be added to our obedience, but a cause of positive offence in the eyes of Eternal Purity! Who is not displeased when a man attempts some great work which is above his powers? and is it an excuse for his miserable performance that the work is above him? Now this is our case; we are bound to serve God with a perfect heart; an exalted work, a work for which our sins disable us. And when we attempt it, necessary as is our endeavour, how miserable must it appear in the eyes of the Angels! how pitiful our exhibition of ourselves! and, withal, how sinful! since did we love God more from the heart, and had we served Him from our youth up, it would not have been with us as it is. Thus our very calling, as creatures, and again as elect children of God, and freemen in the Gospel, is by our sinfulness made our shame; for it puts us upon duties, and again upon the use of privileges, which are above us. We attempt great things with the certainty of failing, and yet the necessity of attempting; and so *while* we attempt, need continual forgiveness for the *failure* of the attempt. We stand before God as the Israelites at the passover of Hezekiah,

who *desired* to serve God according to the Law, but could not do so accurately from lack of knowledge; and we can but offer, through our Great High Priest, our sincerity and earnestness instead of exact obedience as Hezekiah did for them. "The good Lord pardon every one, that *prepareth his heart* to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary[3];" not performing, that is, the full duties of his calling.

And if such be the deficiencies, even of the established Christian, in his ordinary state, how great must be those of the penitent, who has but lately begun the service of God? or of the young, who are still within the influence of some unbridled imagination, or some domineering passion? or of the heavily depressed spirit, whom Satan binds with the bonds of bodily ailment, or tosses to and fro in the tumult of doubt and indecision? Alas, how is their conscience defiled with the thoughts, nay the words of every hour! and how inexpressibly needful for them to relieve themselves of the evil that weighs upon their heart, by drawing near to God in full assurance of faith, and washing away their guilt in the Expiation which He has appointed!

[3] 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19.

What I have said is a call upon you, my brethren, in the first place, to daily private prayer. Next, it is a call upon you to join the public services of the Church, not only once a week, but whenever you have the opportunity; knowing well that your Redeemer is especially present where two or three are gathered together. And, further, it is an especial call upon you to attend upon the celebration of the Lord's supper, in which blessed ordinance we really and truly gain that spiritual life which is the object of our daily prayers. The Body and Blood of Christ give power and efficacy to our daily faith and repentance. Take this view of the Lord's Supper; as the appointed means of obtaining the great blessings you need. The daily prayers of the Christian do but spring from, and are referred back to, his attendance on it. Christ died once, long since: by communicating in His Sacrament, you renew the Lord's death; you bring into the midst of you that Sacrifice which took away the sins of the world; you appropriate the benefit of it, while you eat it under the elements of bread and wine. These outward signs are simply the means of an hidden grace. You do not expect to sustain your animal life without food; be but as rational in spiritual concerns as you are in temporal. Look upon the consecrated elements as *necessary*, under

God's blessing, to your continual sanctification; approach them as the salvation of your souls. Why is it more strange that God should work through means for the health of the soul, than that He should ordain them for the preservation of bodily life, as He certainly has done? It is unbelief to think it matters not to your spiritual welfare whether you communicate or not. And it is worse than unbelief, it is utter insensibility and obduracy, not to discern the state of death and corruption into which, when left to yourselves, you are continually falling back. Rather thank God, that whereas you are sinners, instead of His leaving the mere general promise of life through His Son, which is addressed to all men, He has allowed you to take that promise to yourselves one by one, and thus gives you a humble hope that He has chosen you out of the world unto salvation.

Lastly, I have all along spoken as addressing true Christians, who are walking in the narrow way, and have hope of heaven. But these are the "few." Are there none here present of the "many" who walk in the broad way, and have upon their heads all their sins, from their baptism upwards? Rather, is it not probable that there are persons in this congregation, who, though mixed with the people of God, are really unfor-

given, and if they now died, would die in their sins? First, let those who neglect the Holy Communion ask themselves whether this is not their condition; let them reflect whether among the signs by which it is given us to ascertain our state, there can be, to a man's own conscience, a more fearful one than this, that he is omitting what is appointed as the ordinary means of his salvation. This is a plain test, about which no one can deceive himself. But next, let him have recourse to a more accurate search into his conscience; and ask himself whether (in the words of the text) he "draws near to God with a true heart," i. e. whether in spite of his prayers and religious services, there be not some secret, unresisted lusts within him, which make his devotion a mockery in the sight of God, and leave him in his sins; whether he be not in truth thoughtless, and religious only as far as his friends make him seem so,—or light-minded and shallow in his religion, being ignorant of the depths of his guilt, and resting presumptuously on his own innocence (as he thinks it) and God's mercy;—whether he be not set upon gain, obeying God only so far as *His* service does not interfere with the service of mammon;—whether he be not harsh, evil-tempered,—unforgiving, unpitiful, or high-minded,—self-confident, and secure;—or whether he be not

fond of the fashions of this world, which pass away, desirous of the friendship of the great, and of sharing in the refinements of society;—or whether he be not given up to some engrossing pursuit, which indisposes him to the thought of his God and Saviour.

Any *one* deliberate habit of sin incapacitates a man for receiving gifts of the Gospel. All such states of mind as these are fearful symptoms of the *existence* of some such wilful sin in our hearts; and in proportion as we trace these symptoms in our conduct, so much we dread, lest we be reprobates.

Let us then approach God all of us, confessing that we do not know ourselves; that we are more guilty than we can possibly understand, and can but timidly hope, not confidently determine, that we have true faith. Let us take comfort in our being still in a state of grace, though we have no certain pledge of salvation. Let us beg Him to enlighten us, and comfort us; to forgive us *all* our sins, teaching us those we do not see, and enabling us to overcome them.

SERMON XVII.

MORAL CONSEQUENCES OF SINGLE SINS.

NUMBERS xxxii. 23.

"Be sure your sin will find you out."

THIS is one of those passages in the inspired writings, which, though introduced on a particular occasion and with a limited meaning, express a general truth, such as we seem at once to feel as being far greater than the context requires, and which we use apart from it. Moses warned the Reubenites and Gadites, that, if they, who had already been allotted their inheritance, did not assist their brethren in gaining theirs, their sin would find them out, or be visited on them. And, while he so spoke, He who spoke through him, God the Holy Spirit, conveyed, as we believe, a deeper meaning under his words, for the edification of His Church to the end; viz., He intimated that great law of God's governance, to which all

who study that governance will bear witness, that sin is ever followed by punishment. Day and night follow each other not more surely, than punishment comes upon sin. Whether the sin be great or little, momentary or habitual, wilful or through infirmity, its own peculiar punishment seems according to the law of nature, to follow, as far as our experience of that law carries us,—sooner or later, lighter or heavier, as the case may be.

We Christians indeed are under a dispensation of grace, and are blessed with a certain suspension of this awful law of natural religion. The blood of Christ, as St. John says, is of such wonderful efficacy as to "cleanse us from all sin;" to interpose between our sin and its punishment, and to wipe out the former before the latter has overtaken us. This inestimable benefit is applied to our souls in various ways, according to God's inscrutable pleasure; and so far as this is the case, it supersedes or reverses the law of nature which has annexed suffering to disobedience. But, however effectually and extensively it is applied, still experience assures us that it is not yet vouchsafed to us in full measure and under all circumstances. It is an undeniable fact, that penitents, however truly so, are not secured from the present consequences of their past offences, whether outward or

inward, in mind, body, or estate. And we know that there are cases in which Christians fall away and do not repent again. Nay, we have reason for saying that those who sin after grace given, are, as such, in a worse state than if they had not received it. Great, then, as are our privileges under the Gospel, they in no degree supersede the force and the serious warning of the words in the text. Still it is true, and in many frightful ways, nay more so even than before Christ died, that our sin finds us out, and brings punishment after it, in due course; just as a stone falls to the earth, or as fire burns, or as poison kills, as if by the necessary bond of cause and effect.

The text leads us to consider the consequences of a single sin, such as a breach of their engagement would have been in the Reubenites and Gadites; and to narrow the subject, I shall speak only of the moral consequences. Let us then consider the influence which single sins, past or present, may have on our present moral character in God's sight; how great it may be, will be plain from such reflections as the following:—

And first of all, it is natural to reflect on the probable influence upon us of sins committed in our childhood, and even infancy, which we never realized or have altogether forgotten. Ignorant as we may be when children begin to be respon-

sible beings, yet we are ignorant also when they are not so; nor can we assign a date ever so early at which they certainly are not. And even the latest assignable date is very early; and thenceforward, whatever they do exerts, we cannot doubt, a most momentous influence on their character. We know that two lines starting at a small angle, diverge to greater and greater distances, the further they are produced; and surely in like manner a soul living on into eternity may be infinitely changed for the better or the worse by very slight influences exerted on it in the beginning of its course. A very slight deviation at setting out may be the measure of the difference between tending to hell and tending to heaven.

To give due weight to this thought, we should recollect that children's minds are impressible in a very singular way, such as is not common afterwards. The passing occurrences which meet them, these, whether from their novelty or other cause, rest upon their imagination, as if they had duration; and days or hours, having to them the semblance, may do the work of years. Any one, on casting his thoughts back on his first years, may convince himself of this; the character, which his childhood bears in his memory as a whole, being traceable to a few external circumstances, which lasted through a very small portion of it, a certain

abode, or a visit to some particular place, or the presence of certain persons, or some one spring or summer,—circumstances which he at first cannot believe to have been so transitory as on examination he finds they certainly were.

On the other hand, let it be observed, that we are certainly ignorant of a great deal that goes on in us in infancy and childhood; I mean our illnesses and sufferings as children, which we are either not conscious of at the time, or at any rate forget soon afterwards;—which yet are of a very serious nature, and while they must have a moral cause, known or unknown, must, one would think, have a moral effect also; and while they suggest by their occurrence the possibility of other serious things going on in us also, have moreover a natural tendency to affect us in some way or other. Mysterious as it is that infants and children should suffer pain, surely it is not less so that, when they come to years of reason, they should so forget it, as hardly to be able to believe, when told of it, that they themselves were the very sufferers; yet as sicknesses and accidents then happening permanently affect their body, though they recollect nothing of them, there is no extravagance in the idea that passing sins then contracted and forgotten for ever afterwards, should so affect the soul as to cause those moral

differences between man and man which, however originating, are too clear to be denied. And with this fearful thought before us of the responsibility attaching to the first years of our life, how miserable is it to reflect on the other hand that children are commonly treated as if they were not responsible, as if it did not matter what they did or were! They are indulged, humoured, spoiled, or at best neglected. Bad examples are set them; things are done or said before them, which they understand and catch up, when others least think it, and store in their minds, or act upon; and thus the indelible hues of sin and error are imprinted on their souls, and become as really part of their nature as that original sin in which they were born.

And what is true in infancy and childhood, is in its degree true in after life. Though our earliest years have especially the characteristic of being impressible by outward things, and of being unconscious or forgetful of them, yet at particular seasons afterwards, when the mind is excited, thrown out of its ordinary state, thrown for a while out of its subjection to habit, as if into that original unformed state when it was more free to choose good and evil, then in like manner it takes impressions, and those indelible ones, and withal almost unconsciously, after the

manner of childhood. This is one reason why a time of trial is often such a crisis in a man's spiritual history. It is a season when the iron is heated and malleable; one or two strokes serve to fashion it as a weapon for God or for Satan. Or in other words, if a man is then taken at unawares, an apparently small sin leads to consequences in years and ages to come so fearful, that one can hardly dare contemplate them. This may serve to make us understand the shortness and apparent simplicity of the trial which is sometimes represented in Scripture as sealing the fate of those who succumb to it; Saul's trial, for instance, or Esau's; as on the other hand, indefinitely great results may follow from one act of obedience, as Joseph's in resisting his master's wife, or David in sparing the life of Saul. Such great occasions, good or evil, occur all through life, but especially in youth; and it were well if young persons would realize that they do occur and are momentous. Alas! what would they give afterwards, when they come to repent, or at that most awful season, the future judgment, when they stand before God, and are shortly to enter heaven or hell, not to have done what in a moment of excitement they did—to recall the blasphemous avowal, or the guilty deed—to be what they then were and now are not, free to

serve God, free from the brand and the yoke of Satan! How will they bitterly bewail that fascination, or delirium, or sophistry, which made them what they need not have been, had they used against it the arms which Christ gave them!

But to return: to these single or forgotten sins, such as I have described them, are not improbably to be traced the strange inconsistencies of character which we often witness in the experience of life. I mean, you meet continually with men possessed of a number of good points, amiable and excellent men, yet in one respect perhaps strangely perverted. And you cannot move them, or succeed at all with them, but must leave them as you find them. Perhaps they are weak and over-indulgent towards others, perhaps they are harsh, perhaps they are obstinate, perhaps they are perversely wedded to some wrong opinion, perhaps they are irresolute and undecided,—some fault or other they have, and you lament it, but cannot mend it, and are obliged to take them for what they are, and be resigned, however you may regret. Men are sometimes so good and so great, that one is led to exclaim, Oh that they were only a little better, and a little greater!

This indeed is all the difference between being a true saint of God, and a second rate or third rate Christian. Few men are great saints. There

is always a something; I am not speaking of wilful or admitted sins — sins against the conscience, (they of course exclude a man altogether from any hope,) but of a defect of view and principle, a perversion of character. This is the common case even with the better sort of Christians; they are deformed in stature, they are not upright, they do not walk perfectly with God. And you cannot tell why it is;—they have ever lived religiously,—they have been removed from temptation, had good training and instruction, and they fulfil their calling, are good husbands or wives, good parents, good neighbours,—still when you come to know them well, there is in them this or that great inconsistency.

This consideration moreover tends to account for the strange way in which defects of character are buried in a man. He goes on, for years perhaps, and no one ever discovers his particular failings, nor does he know them himself; till at length he is brought into certain circumstances, which bring them out. Hence men turn out so very differently from what was expected; and we are seldom able to tell beforehand of another, and scarcely ever dare we promise for ourselves, as to the future. The proverb, for instance, says, power tries a man; so do riches, so do various changes of life. We find that after all we do not know

him, though we have been acquainted with him for years. We are disappointed, nay, sometimes startled, as if he had almost lost his identity; whereas perchance it is but the coming to light of sins committed long before we knew him.

Again: single sins indulged or neglected are often the cause of other defects of character, which seem to have no connexion with them, but which after all are rather symptomatic of the former, than themselves at the bottom of the mischief. This is generally acknowledged as regards a sceptical temper of mind, which commonly is assailed by argument in vain, the root of the evil lying deeper, viz. in habits of vice, which however the guilty parties strenuously maintain to be quite a distinct matter, to relate to their conduct, and to have no influence whatever upon their reason or their opinions. And the same thing perhaps holds true in other cases; softness of mind and manner and false refinement may sometimes be the result of allowing ourselves in impure thoughts; or wanderings in prayer may have some subtle connexion with self-conceit; or passionateness may owe its power over us to indulgence, though without excess, in eating and drinking. I am not connecting these several sins together as if in the way of cause and effect, but stating a connexion

which sometimes holds in matter of fact, however we account for it.

Now I will proceed to consider the existence of single sins, and the state of persons labouring under them, in another point of view. I suppose there are few persons indeed, if any, but have some besetting sin or other, some infirmity, some temptation; and in resisting this lies their trial. Now a man may be very religious *all but* this one infirmity, and this one indulged infirmity may in consequence be producing most distressing effects on his spiritual state considered both in itself and in God's sight, without his being aware of it. Suppose, for instance, that a man is naturally resentful and unforgiving. He may, in spite of this, have a great number of excellences, very high views, very deeply seated principles, very great points, great self-devotion to God's service, great faith, great sanctity. I can fancy such a person almost arguing himself out of his own conviction, that he is fostering the secret sin in question, from his consciousness of his own integrity, and his devotional spirit in the general round of his duties. There are sins which, when committed, so acutely distress the mind, that they are far less dangerous to it than their intrinsic heinousness would otherwise make them. Never must we undervalue of

course the extreme misery and guilt of evil thoughts which are often indulged by the young; still afterwards they fill a person with remorse, and are clamorous for his repentance, and before he repents they so burden him, that he has no ease, no satisfaction. He cannot go about his ordinary duties as before; and while all this is felt, great as is their sinfulness, they strike no secret blow, but in a certain sense counteract their own effects. But far different is it with covetousness, conceit, ambition, or resentment, which is the particular sin I am speaking of. It may have ten thousand palliations; it may be disguised by fair names; it affects the conscience only now and then, for a moment, and that is all; the pang is soon over. The pang is momentary, but the ease and satisfaction and harmony of mind arising from the person's exact performance of his general duties are abiding guests within him. Whatever his duties are, these surround him: he is honest, just, temperate, self-denying; he mixes with others, and is perhaps meek and lowly, unassuming and affectionate, or, if need be, firm, clear-sighted in matters of principle, zealous in conduct, pure in his motives. He enters God's house, and his heart responds to what he sees and hears there. He seems to himself to be able to say, "Thou God, seest me!" as if he had no secret

fault at all in his heart. He prays as calmly and seriously as before; he feels, as before, his heart drawn upwards by his Lord's history, or the Psalms of David. He is conscious to himself that he is not of this world. He humbly trusts that there is nothing in this world (through God's grace) that can tempt his heart from his God and Saviour. Do you not see how his imagination is affected by all this? he is in the main what he thinks he is; he thinks himself devoted to God in all active services, in all inward thoughts; and so he is. He is not wrong in thinking so; but in spite of all this, he has just one fault in a different direction,—there is a fault out of sight. He forgets, that in spite of this harmony between all within and all without for twenty-three hours of the day, there is one subject, now and then recurring, which jars with his mind,—there is just one string out of tune. Some particular person has injured him or dishonoured him, and a few minutes of each day, or of each week, are given to the indulgence of harsh, unforgiving thoughts, which at first he suspected were what they really are, sinful, but which he has gradually learned to palliate, or rather account for, on other principles, to refer to other motives, to justify on religious or other grounds. Solomon says, "Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a

stinking savour; so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour[1]." Alas! who can pretend to estimate the effect of this apparently slight transgression upon the spiritual state of any one of us? Who can pretend to say what the effect of it is in God's sight? What do the Angels think of it? What does our own guardian Angel, if one be vouchsafed us, who has watched over us, and been intimate with us from our youth up; who joyed to see how we once grew together with God's grace, but who now is in fear for us? Alas! what is the real condition of our heart itself? Dead bodies keep their warmth a short time; and who can tell, but a soul so circumstanced is severed from the grace of the Ordinances, though he partakes them outwardly, and is but existing upon and exhausting the small treasure of strength and life which is laid up within him? Nay, we know that so it really is, if the sin be deliberate and wilful; for the word of Scripture assures that such sin shuts us out from God's presence, and obstructs the channels by which He gives us grace.

Consider again, how miserable a calamity may from such a cause be inflicted on a whole Church. The intercessions of the Saints are the life of the

[1] Eccl. x. 1.

Church. The alms and good works, the prayers and fastings, the purity, the strict conscientiousness, the devotion of all true believers, high and low, are our safety and protection. When Satan then would afflict her in any of her branches, he begins doubtless by attempting to rob her of that in which her strength lies. He has gained a point, whenever he can entangle religious persons in some deliberate sin, when he can rouse their pride, inflame their resentment, allure their covetousness, or feed their ambitious hopes. One sin is enough: his work is done, when he can put one single obstacle in their road; and there he leaves it, satisfied. And let it be observed, this applies both to the case of individuals and of the Church itself at a given time. For what we know, at this very time Satan may have succeeded in attaching some sin upon us as a people, which is working our destruction, in spite of whatever good points we may really have besides. Love of the world's good things, for instance, may be sufficient to ruin many graces. As to individuals, the case of Achan is quite in point, as you must well recollect. His one sin, secreting from among the spoils of Jericho a goodly Babylonish garment and some gold and silver, brought defeat upon the forces of Israel, and next death upon himself, and death upon his sons and his daughters. Let us not

think that God's providence is materially different now, because we do not happen to see it. The chief difference between His dealings with Jews and with Christians is surely but this: they were visible to the one, to the other invisible. We do not *see* the effects of His wrath now as then, but they are as real, and more terrible. as being proportioned to the greatness of the privileges abused.

And here I will notice another instance, as it may be considered, of a disobedience in one particular only, which sometimes consists with much excellence in other respects; that of separation or alienation from the Church. When we come across persons who have seceded from the Church, or who actively oppose her, or who disbelieve some of her doctrines, it may sometimes happen that we see so much of good principle and right conduct in them, as to be perplexed, and to begin to ask ourselves whether they can be very wrong in their opinions, or whether they themselves gain any harm from them. Now here, let it be observed, I am speaking of those who go counter to the truth, when they might have known better. Again, I would not have you forget that the higher gifts of grace are altogether unseen, as well as the inflictions of God's wrath; but still let us speak of what *is* seen in those who delibe-

rately oppose the Church. I say our imagination is likely to be affected by what appears in them of faith and holiness; and much more the imagination of the persons themselves, who often have no doubt whatever that they are in God's favour. I repeat, I am speaking of those whom God sees to be wilful in their separation; and though we cannot know who are such, and therefore can pronounce judgment absolutely on no one, yet I would have all those who are thrown with persons who, being separatists, may be such, to bear in mind that their seeming to be holy and religious ever so much, does not prove they are really so, supposing they have this one secret sin chargeable upon them in God's books. Just as a man may be in good health, may have his arms and hands his own, his head clear, his mind active, and yet may just have one organ diseased, and the disease not at once appear, but be latent, and yet be mortal, bringing certain death in the event, so may it be with them. As, in the instance just now taken, a man may be upright and noble-minded, with a single purpose and a high resoluteness, kind and gentle, self-denying and charitable, and yet towards one certain individual may cherish feelings of revenge, and so show that some principle short of the love of God rules his heart,—so may it be with those who seem to be good men,

and wilfully leave the Church. Their religious excellences, whatever these may be, are of no avail really against this or any other wilful sin.

To conclude. I have suggested but one or two thoughts on a very large subject, yet through God's mercy they may be useful. They must be useful, if they lead us to be frightened at ourselves. "Who can understand his errors?" says holy David. "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." And how awful is the text, "Your sin will find you out!" Who can undertake to say for himself what and when have been his wilful sins, how frequently they recur, and how continually in consequence he is falling from grace! What need have we of a cleansing and a restoration day by day! What need have we of drawing near to God in faith and penitence, to seek from Him such pardon, such assurance, such strength, as He will vouchsafe to bestow! What need have we to continue in His presence, to remain under the shadow of His throne, to make use of all the means and expedients He allows us, to be stedfast in His Ordinances, and zealous in His precepts, lest we be found shelterless and helpless when He visits the earth!

Moreover, what constant prayers should we offer up to Him that He would be merciful to us

in the dreadful day of judgment! It will indeed be a fearful moment, when we stand before Him in the sight of men and Angels, to be judged according to our works! It will be fearful for ourselves and for all our friends. Then the day of grace will be over; prayers will not avail then, when the books are opened. Let us then plead for ourselves and for each other while it is called to-day. Let us pray Him, by the merits of His cross and passion, to have mercy on us, to have mercy on all we love, on all the Church; to pardon us, to reveal to us our sins, to give us repentance and amendment of life, to give us present grace, and to bestow on us, according to the riches of His love, future blessedness in His eternal kingdom.

SERMON XVIII.

SUBMISSION TO CHURCH AUTHORITY.

PROV. iv. 24—27.

"Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil."

PRECEPTS such as these come home with the force of truth, even to minds which fain would resist them, from their seriousness and practical wisdom, putting aside the authority of inspiration. At no time and under no circumstances are they without their application; at the present time, when religious unity and peace are so lamentably disregarded, and novel doctrines and new measures alone are popular, they naturally remind us of the duty of obedience to the Church, and of the sin of departing from it, or what our Litany prays against under the name of "heresy and schism." It may seem out of place to speak of this sin here,

because those who commit it are not likely to be in Church to profit by what might be said about it; yet the commission of it affects even those who do not commit it, by making them indifferent to it. For this reason, and because it is right that even such persons as are firmest in their adherence to the Church should know why they adhere to it, I will consider some of the popular objections which are made to such adherence, by those who account it, not sinful indeed, (though many go even this length,) but unnecessary.

You know time was when there was but one vast body of Christians, called the Church, throughout the world. It was found in every country where the name of Christ was named; it was every where governed in the same way by Bishops; it was every where descended from the Apostles through the line of those Bishops; and it was every where in perfect peace and unity together, branch with branch, all over the world. Thus it fulfilled the prophecy: "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together; for there are set Thrones of judgment, the Thrones of the House of David [1]." There were, indeed, separatists and dissenters then as now, but they were many and various, not one body like the Church; they were short-lived, had a beginning after the Apostles,

[1] Ps. cxxii. 3. 5.

and came to an end, first one and then another. But now all this beauty of Jerusalem is miserably defaced. That vast Catholic body, "the Holy Church throughout all the world," is broken into many fragments by the power of the Devil; just as some huge barrier cliff which once boldly fronted the sea is at length cleft, parted, overthrown by the waves. Some portions of it are altogether gone, and those that remain are separated from each other. We are the English Catholics; abroad are the Roman Catholics, some of whom are also among ourselves; elsewhere are the Greek Catholics, and so on. And thus we stand in this day of rebuke and blasphemy,—clinging to our own portion of the Ancient Rock which the waters are roaring round and would fain overflow,—trusting in God,—looking for the dawn of day, which "will at length come and will not tarry," when God will save us from the rising floods, if we have courageously kept our footing where He has placed us, neither yielding to the violence of the waves which sweep over us, nor listening to the crafty invitations of those who offer us an escape in vessels not of God's building.

Now I am going to notice and refute some of the bad arguments by which the children of this world convey their invitation.

1. First they say, "Why keep so strictly to one body of Christians when there are so many other bodies also,—so many denominations, so many persuasions,—all soldiers of Christ, like so many different armies, all advancing in one cause against one enemy? Surely this exclusive attachment to one party," so they speak, "to the neglect of other Christians who profess a like doctrine, and only differ in forms, is the sign of a narrow and illiberal mind. Christianity is an universal gift; why then limit its possession to one set of men and one kind of Church government, instead of allowing all who choose to take it to themselves in any way they please?"

Now surely those who thus speak should begin with answering Scripture, not questioning us; for Scripture certainly recognizes but "one body" of Christians as explicitly as "one Spirit, one faith, one Lord, and one God and Father of all[2]." As far as the text of Scripture goes, it is as direct a contradiction of it to speak of more than one body, as to speak of more than one Spirit. On the other hand, Scripture altogether contemplates the *existence* of persuasions, as they are fitly called, round about this one body, for it speaks of them; but it does not hint ever so faintly that, because they exist, therefore they must be acknowledged.

[2] Eph. iv. 4—6.

So much the contrary, that it says, "There must be heresies," that is, private persuasions, self-formed bodies, "among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." Again, "A man that is a heretic," that is, one who adopts some opinion of his own in religious matters, and gets about him followers, "after the first and second admonition, reject." And again, "Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them[3]." Now, we are of those who, in accordance with these directions, have done our best to keep clear of such human doctrines and private opinions, adhering to that one Body Catholic which alone was founded by the Apostles, and will last till the end of all things. And it is surely better thus implicitly to believe and obey God's voice in Scripture, than to reason; it is more tolerable to be called narrow-minded by man, than to be pronounced self-wise and self-sufficient by God; it is happier to be thought over-scrupulous, with the Bible, than to have the world's praise for liberality without it.

But again, who is bold enough to say that "it would be a narrow and niggardly appointment, were the blessings of the Gospel stored up in one body or set of persons to the exclusion of others?" Let him see to it, how he opposes God's universal

[3] 1 Cor. xi. 19; Tit. iii. 10; Rom. xvi. 17.

scheme of providence which we see before our eyes. Christianity is a blessing for the whole earth,—granted; but it does not therefore follow (to judge from what we otherwise know of God's dealings with us,) that none have been specially commissioned to dispense the blessing. Mercies given to multitudes are not less mercies because they are made to flow from particular sources. Indeed, most of the great appointments of Divine goodness are marked by this very character of what men call *exclusiveness*. God distributes numberless benefits to all men, but He does so through a few select instruments. The few are favoured for the good of the many. Wealth, power, gifts of mind, learning, all tend towards the welfare of the community; yet, for all that, they are not given at once to all, but channelled out to the many through the few. And so the blessings of the Gospel are open to the whole world, as freely given as light or fire; yet even light has had its own receptacle since the fourth day of creation, and fire has been hidden in the flinty rock,—as if to show us that the light and fire of our souls are not gained without the use of means, nor except from special sources.

Again, as to the Ministerial Succession being a form, and adherence to it a form, it can only be called a form because we do not see its effects;

did any thing *visible* attend it, we should no longer call it a form. Did a miracle always follow a baptism or a return into the Church, who would any longer call it a form? that is, we call it a form, only so long as we refuse to walk by *faith*, which dispenses with things visible. Faith sees things not to be forms, if commanded, which seem like forms; it realizes consequences. Men ignorant in the sciences would predict no result from chemical and the like experiments; they would count them a form and a pretence. What is prayer but a form? that is, who (to speak generally) sees any thing come of it? But we believe it, and so are blessed. In what sense is adherence to the Church a form in which prayer is not also? The benefit of the one is not seen, nor of the other; the one will not profit the ungodly and careless, nor will the other; the one is commanded in Scripture, so is the other. Therefore, to say that Church-union is a form, is no disparagement of it; forms are the very food of faith.

2. However, it may be argued, that, "whatever was the cause, and whatever was intended by Divine Providence, many sects there are;" and that, "if unity be a duty, as members of the Church maintain, the best, the only way to effect it now, is for them to relax their strictness and join in one with all sects upon whatever terms."

I answer by asking, whether we have any *leave* so to do, any commission to alter any part of what God has appointed; whether we might not as well pretend to substitute another ordinance for Baptism as to annul the rites of the Church Catholic, and put human societies and teachers of man's creating on a level with it? Balaam even felt what was the power of a Divine appointment. "He hath blessed," he says, "*and I cannot reverse it.*" Even holy Isaac, much as he wished it, could not change the course of the blessing once conferred, or the decree of God. He cried out of Jacob, "yea, and he shall be blessed;" for "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth," "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man," "but of God that showeth mercy." "The gifts and calling of God, are without repentance [4]."

Men, who have themselves separated from the Church, sometimes urge a union among all Christians in the following way: they say, "We dissent from you; yet we will cast aside our forms if you will cast aside yours. Thus there will be mutual concession. What are forms, so that our hearts are one?" Nay, but there is not, there cannot be, a like heart and spirit, from the very nature of the

[4] Numb. xxiii. 20; Gen. xxvii. 33; Rom. ix. 16; John i. 13; Rom. xi. 29.

case, between us and them, for obedience to the Church is one part of our spirit. Those who think much of submission to her authority as we do, plainly do differ in spirit from those who think little of it. Such persons, then, however well they mean it, yet, in fact, ask us to give up something, while they give up nothing themselves; for that is not much to give up which a man sets no value upon. All they give up is what they themselves disparage by calling a form. They call *our* holy discipline also a form, but we do not; and it is not a mere form in our judgments, though it may be in theirs. They call it a human invention, just as they call their own; but, till we call it so also, till they have first convinced us that it is, it must be a sacrifice in us to give it up, such as they cannot possibly make. They cannot make such sacrifice, because they have made it already, or their fathers before them, when they left the Church. They cannot make it, for they have no affections to sacrifice in the matter; whereas our piety, our reverence, our faith, our love adhere to the Church of the Apostles, and could not (were desertion possible, which God forbid!) could not be torn away from it without many wounds and much anguish. Surely, then, it is craft, or over-simplicity, in those who differ from us, thus to speak. They strip themselves of what we con-

sider an essential of holiness, the decencies and proprieties of the Ancient Rule. Then, being unclothed, they are forced to array themselves in new forms and ordinances, as they best may; and these novelties, which their own hands have sewed together to cover them, which they never revered, and which are soon to wither, they purpose (as though) to sacrifice to us, provided we, on our part, will cast from us the Lord's own clothing, that sanctity and sobriety of order, which is the gift of Christ, the earnest of His imputed merits, the type and the effectual instrument of His work in our hearts. This, truly, would be exchanging the fine gold for brass; or, like unthankful Esau, bartering our enduring birthright for an empty and transitory benefit.

3. But the argument is continued. "Well," it may be said, "even granting that obedience to the Church be a Scripture duty, still, when there are erroneous teachers in it, surely it is a higher duty to desert them for their error's sake than to keep to them for form's sake." Now, before this question can be answered, the error must be specified which this or that teacher holds. The plain and practical question we have to decide is, whether his error be such as to suspend his power of administering the Sacraments. It must be deadly indeed and monstrous to effect this; and,

surely, this ministry of the Sacraments, not of the outward word,—of the spirit, not of the letter,—is his principal power and our principal need. It is our interest, it is our soul's interest, that we keep to those who minister divine benefits, even though they "offend in many things." And it is plainly our duty also. If they be in error, let us pray for them, not abandon them. If they sin against us, let not us sin against them. Let us return good for evil. Thus David acted even towards Saul his persecutor. He "behaved himself wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him [5]." The cruelty of Saul was an extreme case; yet David's "eyes looked right on," and "he turned not to the right hand nor the left." He still honoured Saul, as put over him by Almighty God. So ought we, in St. Paul's words, to "obey them that have the rule over us, and submit ourselves." In truth, the notion that errors in a particular teacher justify separation from the Church itself, is founded in a mistake as to the very object (as it may be considered) for which teaching was committed to it. If individual teachers were infallible, there would be no need of order and rule at all. If we had a living Head upon earth, such as once our Saviour was

[5] 1 Sam. xviii. 14.

with His disciples, teaching and directing us in all things, the visible Church might *so far* be dispensed with. But, since we have not, a form of doctrine, a system of laws, a bond of subordination connecting all in one, is the next best mode of securing the stability of sacred Truth. The whole body of Christians thus become the *trustees* of it, to use the language of the world, and, in fact, have thus age after age transmitted it down to ourselves. Thus, teachers have been bound to teach in one way not in another, as well as hearers to hear. As, then, we have a share in the advantage, let us not complain of sharing in the engagement; as we enjoy the Truth at this day by the strictness of those who were before us, let us not shrink from undergoing that through which we have inherited it. If hearers break the rule of discipline, why should not teachers break the rule of faith? and if we find fault with our teacher, even while he is restrained by the Church's rule, how much greater would be our complaint when he was not so restrained? Let us not, then, be impatient of an appointment which effects so much, on the ground that it does not effect all. Let us not forget that rules presuppose the risk of error, but rather reflect whether they do not do more than they fail to do. Let us be less selfish than to think of ourselves

only. Let us look out upon the whole community, the poor, the ignorant, the wayward, and the mistaken. Let us consider whether it will be prudent to become responsible for the Church's ultimately withdrawing from our land, which we shall be (as far as in us lies) by our withdrawing from it.

4. But it may be said, "Faith is not a matter of words, but of the heart. It is more than the formal doctrine, it is the temper and spirit of this or that teacher which is wrong. His creed may be orthodox, but his religion is not vital; and surely external order must not lie upon us as a burden, stifling and destroying the true inward fellowship between Christian and Christian." Now let it be carefully noted that, if order is to be preserved at all, it must be at the expense of what seems to be of more consequence, *viz.* the so-called communion of the heart between Christians. This peculiarity is involved in its very nature; and surely our Saviour knew this when he enjoined it. For consider a moment. True spiritual feeling, heartfelt devotion, lively faith, and the like, do not admit of being described, defined, ascertained in any one fixed way; as is implied indeed in the very objection under consideration. We form our judgment of them, whatever it be, by a number of little circumstances, of language, manner, and

conduct, which cannot be put into words, which to no two beholders appear exactly the same, insomuch that if every one is to be satisfied, every one must have the power of drawing his line for himself. But if every one follow his own rule of fellowship, how can there possibly be but "one body," and in what sense are those words of the Apostle to be taken?

Again, this or that person may be more or less religious in speech and conduct; how are we to draw the line, even according to our own individual standard, and say who are to be in our Church and who out of it? Scandalous offenders indeed and open heretics might be excluded at once; but it would be far easier to say whom to put out than whom to let in, unless we let in all. From the truest believer to the very infidel there may be interposed a series of men, more or less religious, in human eyes, gradually filling up the whole interval. Even if we could infallibly decide between good and bad, life would be spent in the work; what our success really will be, may be foretold from the instances of those who attempt to do so, and who not unfrequently mistake for highly-gifted Christians men who are almost unbelievers. But, granting we have some extraordinary gift of discernment, still any how we could not see more than He sees, who implies

that the faith of all of us is but immature and in its rudiments, by His very postponement of the final judgment;—so that to draw a line at all, and yet to include just all who seem religious, are things of necessity incompatible with each other.

On the other hand, forms are precise and definite. Once broken, they are altogether broken. There are no degrees of breaking them; either they are observed or they are not. It seems, then, on the whole, that if we leave the Church, in order to join what appears a less formal, a more spiritual, religion elsewhere, we break a commandment for certain, and we do not for certain secure to ourselves a benefit.

5. Lastly it may be asked, "Are we then to keep aloof from those whom we think good men, granting that it would be better that they should be in the Church?" We need not, we must not, keep aloof. We are not bound, indeed, to court their society, but we are bound not to shrink from them when we fall in with them, except, indeed, they be the actual authors and fomenters of division. We are bound to love them and pray for them; not to be harsh with them, or revile or despise them, but to be gentle, patient, apt to teach, merciful, to make allowance, to interpret their conduct for the best. We would, if we could, be one with them in heart and in form,

thinking a loving unity the glory and crown of Christian faith; and we will try all means to effect this; but we feel, and we cannot conceal it, we feel that, if we and they are to be one, they must come over to us. We desire to meet together, but it must be in the Church, not on neutral ground, or rather an enemy's, the open inhospitable waste of this world, but within that sheltered heritage whose landmarks have long since been set up. If Christ has constituted one Holy Society (which He has done); if His Apostles have set it in order (which they did), and have expressly bidden us (as they have in Scripture) not to undo what they have begun; and if (in matter of fact) their Work so set in order and so blessed is among us this very day (as it is), and we partakers of it, it were a traitor's act in us to abandon it, an unthankful slight on those who have preserved it for so many ages, a cruel disregard of those who are to come after us, nay of those now alive who are external to it and might otherwise be brought into it. We must transmit as we have received. We did not make the Church, we may not unmake it. As we believe it to be a Divine Ordinance, so we must ever protest against separation from it as a sin. There is not a dissenter living, but, inasmuch, and so far as he dissents, is in a sin. It may, in this or that instance, be a

sin of infirmity, or carelessness, nay of ignorance; it may be a sin of the society a man is in, not his own, a ceremonial offence, not a personal; still it is in its nature sinful. It may be mixed up with much that is good; it may be a perversion of conscience, or again, an inconsistency in him; it may be connected more or less with piety towards his forefathers; still, considered as such, it cannot but be a blemish and a disadvantage, and, if he is saved, he will be saved, not through it, but in spite of it. So far forth as he dissents, he is under a cloud; and though we too may, for what we know, have as great sins to answer for, taking his sin at the greatest, and though we pray that Christ will vouchsafe, in some excellent way, known to Himself, to "perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle," all "who love Him uncorruptly," even if separate from the glories of His Church on earth, still protest we should and must against separation itself, and wilful continuance in it, as evil, —as nothing short of "the gainsaying of Core," and the true child of that sin which lost us Eden.

Nor does the sin of separation end in itself. Never suppose, my brethren, whatever the world may say, that a man is neither better nor worse, in his own faith and conduct, for separating from the Church. Of course we cannot "try the heart and the reins," or decide about individuals; still

thus much seems clear, that, on the whole, deliberate insubordination is the symptom, nay often the cause and first beginning of an unhumbled, wilful, self-dependent, contentious, jealous spirit; and as far as any man allows himself in acts of it, so far has he upon him the tokens of pride or of coldness of heart, going before or following after. Coldness and pride,—these sins are not peculiar, alas! to those who leave us; that we know full well. We all have the seeds of them within us, and it is our shame and condemnation if we do not repress them. But between us, if we be cold or proud, and those who are active in dissent, there is this clear difference; that proud reliance on self, or that cold formality, which may also be found in the Church, these, though found in it, are not fruits of it, do not rise from connexion with it, but are inconsistent with it. For to obey is to be meek, not proud; and to obey for Christ's sake is to be zealous, not cold; whereas wilful separation or turbulent conduct, forming religious meetings of our own, opposing our private judgment to those who have the rule over us, disaffection towards them, and the like feelings and courses, are the very effects and the sure forerunners of pride, or impatience, or restlessness or self-will, or lukewarmness; so that these sins in members of the Church are in spite of the

Church, but in separatists are involved in their separating.

"Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil." What have we, private Christians, to do with hopes and fears of earth, with schemes of change, the pursuit of novelties, or dreams of reforms? The world is passing like a shadow; the day of Christ is hastening on. It is our wisdom surely to use what has been provided for us, instead of lusting after what we have not, asking flesh to eat, and gazing wistfully upon Egypt or on the heathen around us. Faith has no leisure to act the busy politician, to bring the world's language into the sacred fold, or to use the world's jealousies in a divine polity; to demand rights, to flatter the many, or to court the powerful. What is faith's highest wish and best enjoyment? A dying saint shall answer. It is related of a meek and holy confessor of our own, shortly before his departure, that when after much pain he was asked by a friend, "What more special thing he would recommend for one's whole life?" he briefly replied, "*uniform obedience;*" by which he meant, as his

biographer tells us, that the happiest state of life was one, in which we had not to command or direct, but *to obey solely;* not having to choose for ourselves, but having our path of duty, our mode of life, our fortunes marked out for us[6]. This lot, indeed, as is plain, cannot be the lot of all; but it is the lot of the many. Thus God pours out His blessings largely, and puts trial on the few; but men do not understand their own gain, and run into trials as being unfit for enjoyment. May He give us grace to cherish a wiser mind; to make much of our privilege, if we have it, to serve and be at rest; and if we have it not, to covet it, and to bear, dutifully, as but a misfortune to a sinner, that freedom from restraint which the world boasts in as a chief good!

[6] Fell's Life of Hammond.

SERMON XIX.

THE GAINSAYING OF KORAH.

JUDE 11.

"Woe unto them; for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core."

THERE are two special sins which trouble the Church, and are denounced in Scripture, ambition and avarice, the sin of Korah and the sin of Balaam; both of which are spoken of in the text. The sin of Balaam is denounced again and again by St. Paul, in his Epistles to Timothy and Titus; as where he says, "A Bishop must be .... not greedy of filthy lucre.... not covetous;" "the Deacons must be .... not greedy of filthy lucre;" noticing the while that some supposed that "gain was godliness," and "taught things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake[1]." And the sin

[1] 1 Tim. iii. 8. vi. 5. Tit. i. 7, 11.

of Korah, or ambition, is condemned by our Lord, when He commands, "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;" by St. James, when he says, "Be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation;" and by St. Paul, when he directs that a Bishop should not be a "novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil[2]." And both sins together are spoken of by St. Peter, in his exhortation to the Elders to "feed the flock of God .... not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock[3]."

Accordingly, these are the two sins brought before us by our Church in the first lessons of the first Sunday after Easter, which is, as it were, the festival in commemoration of the Ministerial Commission. After celebrating the resurrection of Christ, when He became "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," we proceed to make mention of the means which He has instituted for exercising His Priesthood on earth continually,—for commemorating and applying in the Spirit, among His elect people, again and

[2] Matt. xx. 26. James iii. 1. 1 Tim. iii. 6.
[3] 1 Pet. v. 2, 3.

again, day after day, to the end of the world, that atoning death and glorious resurrection, which He wrought out once for all in his own person on Calvary. He Himself instituted that means on the very day that He rose from the dead, ordaining man, frail and fallible as he is, to be the vessel of His gifts, and to represent Him. When He was risen, He did not first show Himself to His enemies, nor manifest the Spirit, nor unfold His new law, nor destroy the Temple; but He consecrated His Ministers: "As My Father hath sent Me," He said to His Apostles, "even so send I you." And, as if after His pattern, we too, even at this day, follow up the celebration of His "taking to Himself His great power," with that of His delegating it to His Church, as the Gospel selected for the same Sunday shows.

Of such high importance then, in our Church's judgment, is the subject of the Christian Ministry; so intimately connected with the Divine scheme of mercy, so full of reverence and awe. This will be best seen by proceeding, as I shall now do, to consider the lesson derived from the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, which, though properly belonging to the Old Covenant, our Church certainly considers applicable to us Christians.

The history in question contains an account, not only of the ambition of Korah himself, who was a Levite or minister, but of the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram, who were not ministers, but, as we now speak, laymen.

In considering it, I shall confine myself to this point, viz. to determine the feelings and circumstances under which these wicked men rebelled against Moses and Aaron, and that, with a view of warning those who speak lightly of schism, separation, and dissent, in this day. For I think it will be seen that they are feelings and circumstances which prevail very widely now as well as then, and, if they do prevail, are as evil now as they were then; St. Jude, in the text, plainly intimating that such gainsaying as Korah's is a sin in a Christian, as well as formerly in the Jews, and that those who commit it are in the way to perish. This, then, is a very serious thought; considering, as I have said, how men in these days make light of it.

The outline of the history of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram is this: they rebelled against Moses and Aaron, and in consequence Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up by an earthquake, and Korah's company was burnt with fire. Now, then, let us proceed to the remarks proposed.

1. First, then, let the number and dignity of

the offenders be observed. They seem to have been some of the most eminent and considerable persons in Israel. Dathan and Abiram's party are said more than once, with some emphasis, to have been "famous in the congregation, men of renown[4]." Moreover there were among them as many as two hundred and fifty *princes*, or, as we should now say, noblemen. A very great and formidable opposition to Moses and Aaron was it, when so great a number of eminent persons rebelled against, or (in modern language) became dissenters from the Church. Nor was this all, —a portion of God's appointed ministers joined them. The Levites, as we all know, were the especially holy tribe: a portion of them, viz. the family of Aaron, were priests; but all of them were ministers. Such was Korah; but, dissatisfied with being merely what God had made him, he aspired to be something more, to have the priesthood. And it appears that just as many of his brethren joined him in his rebellion as there were princes who joined Dathan and Abiram. Two hundred and fifty Levites, or ministers, were banded together in this opposition to Moses, forming, from their rank and number, a body (to use once more modern language) of very high

[4] Numb. xvi. 2; xxvi. 9.

respectability, to say the least, that is, respectability in the eyes of men.

2. Next, let us observe how confident they were that they were right. They seemed to have entertained no kind of doubt or hesitation. When Moses denounced Dathan and Abiram, and bade all those who wished to escape their curse, to "depart" at once "from the tents of those wicked men," "Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children." You see they had no misgivings, no fears, no perplexity; they saw their way clear; they were sure they were in the right; and they came out, to stand any test, any sentence of wrath which Moses might attempt, as thinking that nothing could come of it. Nor was Korah's confidence less. Moses challenged him and the rest to appear before God, to perform the priest's office, and so to stand the test whether or not He would accept them; and they promptly accepted the proposal. They were to "take their censers, and put fire therein, and put incense in them before the Lord," "and it shall be, that the man whom the Lord doth choose, he shall be holy." Korah and his company accordingly "stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron;" nay, in that sacred and awful place,

where was the glory of the Lord visibly displayed, did Korah endure to "gather all *the congregation*" against Moses and Aaron. Sceptics, were there such standing by, might have made the remark, that both parties were equally sincere, equally confident; and therefore neither was more pleasing to God than the other.

Such was the confidence of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, of the two hundred and fifty princes or nobles, and the two hundred and fifty ministers of God. And we, who believe that in spite of their confidence Almighty God was against them, are perhaps at first sight tempted to attribute it to some extraordinary infatuation, judicial blindness, special hard-heartedness, or the like,—something quite out of the way, peculiar perhaps to the Jews, —something which cannot happen now. We cannot comprehend how their confidence could possibly be based on *reason* (I do not say on correct reason), but on even *apparent* reason. We do not consider that perhaps they *thought* they had good reasons for what they did, as we often think in our own case, when we have not. Rather we attribute their conduct to something irrational, to pride, obstinacy, or hatred of the truth, as indeed it was in its origin; but I mean, to some such evil principle operating on the soul *at once*, and not operating on it *through* the pretence of reason, not so

operating as to be hidden whether from themselves or others. And thus we lose the lesson which this solemn history is calculated to convey to us at this day; because, since the opposition made to God's Church in these days is professedly based upon reason, not upon mere prejudice, passion, or wilfulness, persons think that the confidence with which they oppose themselves to it, is a very different sort of confidence from that of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, whereas it is really very much the same.

3. What, then, were the *reasons* or *arguments* which made Korah, Dathan, and Abiram so confident they were in the right,—so confident, that they even ventured to appeal to God, and to rise up against Moses and Aaron as if in the name of the Lord? Their ground was this: they accused Moses and Aaron of what is now called *priestcraft*. Let us pay attention to this circumstance.

Now, let it be observed, that there were many rebellions of the people, founded on open and professed *unbelief*. This was not the character of the particular sin under review: it was not a disbelief in God, but in Moses. Distrust in Moses, indeed, was mixed up in all their rebellions; but generally their rebellion was more strictly directed against Almighty God. Thus, when the spies returned, and spread about an evil report of the

good land, and the people believed them, this implied a disbelief in the Divine Arm altogether, as manifested in their deliverance and protection. Thus they complained of the manna; and thus they went out on the seventh day to gather it. But it is remarkable, that in the rebellion before us, there is no hint of the promoters of it disbelieving in the power or providence of God over the chosen people; only they accuse Moses of altering or (as we should say) corrupting the divine system. Dathan and Abiram were sons of Reuben, the first-born of the tribes: they might consider that Moses was interfering with their prerogative by birth to lead and govern the people. But, any how, they seem to have relied on their rank and eminence; they and their companions were "famous in the congregation, men of renown," and they could not bring themselves to submit to God's appointment, by which the nation was formed into a Church, and Levi was chosen, at God's inscrutable will, to be the priest instead of Reuben. Accordingly, far from denying that God was with the nation, they maintained it; they only said that He was not specially with Moses and Aaron; they only claimed an equality of honour and power with Moses and Aaron; they only denounced Moses and Aaron as usurpers, tyrants, and hypocrites. Far from showing any

scoffing or lightness of mind, or profaneness, like Esau's who rejected the blessing, they so esteemed it as to claim it as their own own, in all its fulness; nay, they claimed it for the whole people. They were only opposed to what is now called *exclusiveness;* they were champions of the rights of the people against what they called the encroachments, the arrogant pretensions, the priestcraft of Moses, their Lawgiver, and Aaron the Saint of the Lord. They said, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing *all* the congregation are holy, *every one of them;* and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves *above* the congregation of the Lord?" Their objection was, that Moses was interposing himself as a mediator between God and them,—limiting the mercies of God, restraining the freedom, obscuring the glory of His grace, and robbing them of their covenanted privileges; that he had instituted an order of priests, whereas they were *all* priests, every one, and needed no human assistance, no voice or advice, or direction, or performance, from fallible man, from men of like passions and imperfections with themselves, to approach God withal, and serve Him acceptably. "*All* the congregation are holy," say they, "every one of them; and the Lord is among them." "The Lord is not far off; He is not in the clouds only, He is not on Sinai,

He is not on the mercy-seat, He is not with Aaron; but He is among us, in the congregation, as near one man as another, as near all of us as He is to Moses." Their partisans affect the same tone even after God's judgment has fallen on the rebels. The people say to Moses and Aaron, "Ye have killed the people of the Lord." Yes; they call those separatists and schismatics "the Lord's people," and they accuse Moses and Aaron forsooth of having by some device of juggling priests, some strange and diabolical stratagem, some secret of magic or science, compassed the death of their enemies, while they pretended to refer it to a miraculous judgment; and they seem as if to pride themselves on their discernment, on the clearness of intellectual visionby which they saw through the fraud, and brought it home to the impostors.

Awful guilt indeed in these self-wise men, if this representation be true! yet it is apparently true, as the words show with which the rebels themselves answer the summons of Moses to come to him. "Wilt thou," say they, "put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up[5]." No; we have eyes; we are not mere dull, brutish, superstitious bigots, to crouch before a priest, and submit to his yoke of bondage; we can reason,

[5] Vid. Lyra Apostolica, Poem 151. ed. 2.

we can argue, we are resolved to exercise our free unfettered private judgment, and to determine (candidly indeed and dispassionately), but still to determine for ourselves before we act. We will indeed give a fair hearing to what is told us; we will listen with a becoming deference and with all patience, nay with a sort of consideration and prepossession to what you, O Moses and Aaron, say to us; but still we will not have our eyes put out. No, seeing is believing; we will not go by instinctive feeling, by conscience, by mere probabilities; but every thing shall be examined in a rational and enlightened way, every thing searched, and sifted, and scrutinized and rigidly tested, before it is admitted. The burden of proof lies with you; till you have proved to us your claims, we will not go up, we will not obey. To tell the truth, we are suspicious of you. We are "jealous with a godly jealousy," (alas! for men do so speak!) of any encroachments on our spiritual liberty, any assumption of superior holiness, superior acceptableness in one of us over another. We are all brethren, we are all equal, all independent. "Wilt thou make thyself altogether a prince over us?" "Moreover," they continue, "thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards;" or as men now speak, The

present system does not work well; there are many abuses, abundant need of reform, much still undone which should be done, much idleness, much inefficiency, many defects in the Church. We see it quite plainly. Do not seek to defend yourselves. "Wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up."

Something of the same kind of spirit had already shown itself in the sin of the golden calf, though that sin was open idolatry. Then also the people thought that they had found a better religion than Moses had taught them. They were far from denying God's miraculous providences; but they said that Moses had taken to himself what belonged to the nation; he had taught them in his own way, and they had a right to choose for themselves. "Up," they said, "make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him[6]." And where was Moses? He was with God in prayer and vision. They did not know, or at least understand this. So they said, "What a time for a ruler to be absent! in what a crisis! how much is there that wants doing!—forty days are gone, and he is still away. Is he lost? has he

[6] Exod. xxxii. 1.

left us here to ourselves? is he feigning any communication from heaven? any how, what binds us to *him?* We are bound indeed to the God who has brought us out of Egypt, but not to the rule of Moses or the line of Aaron." Moses was away; and where was Aaron?—where? the people could not ask, for they were partakers in his sin, rather, they had forced him into their sin, the sin of the golden calf. Aaron was receiving their gold ornaments, and was moulding them into an idol. Alas! the people could not accuse, who had seduced him into the sin. But there *were* those who might, who did complain; and who they were, since I have been led to the subject, it will be found to our present purpose to inquire.

They were the Levites. While Aaron sinned, they the inferior ministers stood silent, but wondering and distressed. These had no part in the sin; and when Moses came down from the mount and said, "Who is on the Lord's side[7]?" then they, and they only, answered the call. "All the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him;" and when he ordered them, they promptly "put every man his sword by his side, and went in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slew every man his brother, and every man

[7] Exod. xxii. 26.

his companion, and every man his neighbour;" and "there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." This is considered in Scripture[8] the act of consecration by which the Levites became the sacred tribe; so that their advancement to the ministerial office is historically coincident with Aaron's temporary defection from his more sacred duties in it. All this had happened, as some suppose shortly before, as others think as much as twenty years before, the occurrence which has been under our immediate review; but whether or not the one transaction, as has been reasonably conjectured, led to the other, whether or not Korah's stouthearted rebellion was the result[9] of ambitious views in the Levites, which their advancement to the sacred ministry had occasioned, still certain it is that at this time "it seemed but a small thing unto them" (in Moses' words) "that the God of Israel had separated them from the congregation of Israel, to bring them near to Himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the Lord, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them;" and "they sought the priesthood also," Aaron's portion, on whom they were appointed to attend[1]. And the circumstance that Aaron had failed on that trying occasion

[8] Exod. xxxii. 29. [9] Vid. Patrick on Numb. xvi. 2.
[1] Numb. iii. 10.

when they were rewarded, might dispose them to contemn him at this time, not recollecting that God's will made the difference between man and man, and that He who gave them His covenanted blessings through bulls and calves, might also vouchsafe them, did it please Him, through frail and erring men; and might dispense with inward perfection, and take up with mere earthen vessels, and be content with faith instead of consistent obedience, as He dispensed with eloquence, or wisdom, or strength. Such then were the circumstances under which the Levites rebelled, being elated by their existing privileges, as the Reubenites were stimulated by jealousy.

The parties then concerned in this formidable conspiracy were not besotten idolaters; they were not infidels; they were not obstinate, prejudiced, unreasoning zealots; they were not the victims of unscrupulous and desperate ambition: but though ambitious, proud, headstrong, obstinate, unbelieving, they veiled all these bad principles even from their own conscience under a show of reason, of clear, simple, straightforward, enlightened reason, under a plain argument open to the meanest capacity: "*All* the congregation," they said, "were holy, *every one*." God had signified no exception or exclusion; all had been baptized in the Red Sea, all had been at Sinai. Moses how-

ever, thus they might speak, had added to this simple and primitive religion a system of his own, a system of priestcraft. The especial favours which God had shown Moses were done twenty years before, and could be denied without much chance of contradiction; or if the rebellion took place (as others say) shortly after the Exodus, then it came close upon Aaron's sin in the matter of the golden calf. Any how, an excuse was easily found for explaining away the authority of Moses and Aaron, for denying the priesthood, and accusing it of being a corruption; and for professing to be the champions of a pure and enlightened, and uncorrupt worship,—a worship which would be quite clear of the idolatrous acts of Aaron, because in it Aaron's prerogative would be destroyed altogether.

Such is the history of the Church in the wilderness, in which we see as in a type the history of the Gospel. And how did it end? I stated in the commencement. The earth opened, and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the congregation of Abiram, their houses, their families, their possessions, and all that belonged to them. Fire went out from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who offered incense.

A very few words will suffice to suggest the

lesson to be derived from this awful history ; it is this :—If the Old Testament is still our rule of duty, except in such details as imply a local religion and a material sanctuary ; if it is our rule of duty in its principles, its doctrines, its precepts ; if the Gospel is but the fulfilment and development of the Law ; if the parts in both are the same, only the circumstances without and the spirit within new ; if though Circumcision is abolished, yet there is Baptism instead of it ; the Passover abolished, yet Holy Communion instead; the Sabbath abolished, yet instead of it the Lord's Day ; if the two tables of stone which contained the Law are destroyed, yet the Sermon on the Mount takes their place ; if though Moses is gone, Christ is come ; and if in like manner, though Aaron is gone and his priestly line, another order of priests is come instead ; (and unless this is so, the Old Testament is in a great measure but a dead letter to Christians ; and if there be but a chance that it is so, and if it has always been taken to be so, it is a most serious matter to act as if it were not so ;) how great must be the sin of resisting the ministers of Christ, or of intruding into their office ! How great the sin of presuming to administer the rites of the Church, to baptize, to celebrate the Holy Communion, or to ordain, or to bless, without a commission ! Korah's sin was

kept in remembrance for ever on the covering of the Altar, "to be a memorial," says the inspired writer, "that no stranger which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord, that he be not as Korah and as his company," in other words, as the warning is to be interpreted now, "that no one, who is not descended from the Apostles by laying on of hands, come near to perform the ministerial office before the Lord, that he be not such as Korah and his company." Many, you will say, intrude into it in this day in ignorance. True, it is so. Therefore, for them let us pray in our Lord's words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

SERMON XX.

OBEDIENCE WITHOUT LOVE, AS INSTANCED IN THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM.

NUMBERS xxii. 38.

"The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak."

WHEN we consider the Old Testament as written by Divine inspiration, and preserved, beyond the time of its own Dispensation, for us Christians, —as acknowledged and delivered over to us by Christ Himself, and pronounced by St. Paul to be "profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness[1]," — we ought not surely to read any portion of it with indifference, nay without great and anxious interest. "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"—is the sort of inquiry which spontaneously arises in the serious mind. Christ and His Apostle cannot have put the Law and the Prophets into our hands for

[1] 2 Tim. iii. 16.

nothing. I would this thought were more carefully weighed than it commonly is. We profess indeed to revere the Old Testament; yet, for some reason or other, at least one considerable part of it, the historical, is regarded by the mass of those even who think about religion, as merely historical, as a relation of facts, as antiquities; not in its divine characters, not in its practical bearings, not in reference to themselves. The notion that God speaks in it to them personally, the question, "*What* does He say?" "What must I *do?*" does not occur to them. They consider that the Old Testament concerns them only as far as it can be made typical of one or two of the great Christian doctrines; they do not consider it in its fulness, and in its literal sense, as a collection of deep moral lessons, such as are not vouchsafed in the New, though St. Paul expressly says that it is "profitable for instruction in righteousness."

If the Old Testament history generally be intended as a permanent instruction to the Church, much more, one would think, must such prominent and remarkable passages in it as the history of Balaam. Yet I suspect a very great number of readers carry off little more from it than the impression of the miracle which occurs in it, the speaking of his ass. And not unfrequently they talk more lightly on the subject than is expedient.

Yet I think some very solemn and startling lessons may be drawn from the history, some of which I shall now attempt to set before you.

What is it which the chapters in question present to us? The first and most general account of Balaam would be this;—that he was a very eminent person in his age and country, that he was courted and gained by the enemies of Israel, and that he promoted a wicked cause in a very wicked way; that when he could do nothing else for it, he counselled his employers to employ their women as means of seducing the chosen people into idolatry; and that he fell in battle in the war which ensued. These are the chief points, the prominent features of his history as viewed at a distance;—and repulsive indeed they are. He took on him the office of a tempter, which is especially the Devil's office. But Satan himself does not seem so hateful near as at a distance; and when we look into Balaam's history closely, we shall find points of character which may well interest those who do not consider his beginning and his end. Let us then approach him more nearly, and forget for a moment the summary account of him, which I have just been giving.

Now first he was blessed with God's especial favour. You will ask at once, How could so bad a man be in God's favour? but I wish you to put

aside reasonings, and contemplate facts. I say he was especially favoured by God; God has a store of favours in His treasure-house, and of various kinds,—some for a time, some for ever,—some implying His approbation, others not. He showers favours even on the bad. He makes His sun to rise on the unjust as well as on the just. He willeth not the death of a sinner. He is said to have loved the young ruler, whose heart, notwithstanding, was upon the world. His loving-mercy extends over all His works. How He separates in His own divine thought, kindness from approbation, time from eternity, what He does from what He foresees, we know not and need not inquire. At present He is loving to all men, as if He did not foresee that some are to be saints, others reprobates to all eternity. He dispenses His favours variously, — gifts, graces, rewards, faculties, circumstances being indefinitely diversified, nor admitting of discrimination or numbering on our part. Balaam, I say, was in His favour; not indeed for his holiness' sake, not for ever; but in a certain sense, according to His inscrutable purpose, — who chooses whom He will choose, and exalts whom He will exalt, without destroying man's secret responsibilities or His own governance, and the triumph of truth and holiness, and His own strict

impartiality in the end. Balaam was favoured in an especial way above the mere heathen. Not only had he the grant of inspiration, and the knowledge of God's will, an insight into the truths of morality, clear and enlarged, such as we Christians even cannot surpass; but he was even admitted to conscious intercourse with God, such as even Christians have not. In our Sunday Services, you may recollect, we read the chapters which relate to this intercourse; and we do not read those which record the darker passages of his history. Now, do you not think that most persons, who know only so much of him as our Sunday lessons contain, form a very mild judgment about him? They see him indeed to be on the wrong side, but still view him as a prophet of God. Such a judgment is not incorrect as far as it goes; and I appeal to it, if it be what I think it is, as a testimony how highly Balaam was in God's favour.

But again, Baalam was, in the ordinary and commonly received sense of the word, without straining its meaning at all, a very *conscientious* man. That this is so, will be plain from some parts of his conduct and some speeches of his, of which I proceed to remind you; and which will show also his enlightened and admirable view of moral and religious obligation. When Balak sent

to him to call him to curse Israel, he did not make up his mind for himself, as many a man might do, or according to the suggestions of avarice and ambition. No, he brought the matter before God in prayer. He *prayed* before he did what he did, as a religious man ought to do. Next, when God forbade his going, he at once, as was right, positively refused to go. "Get you into your land," he said, "for the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." Balak sent again a more pressing message and more lucrative offers, and Balaam was even more decided than before. "If Balak," he said, "would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." Afterwards God gave him leave to go. "If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them[2]." Then, and not till then, he went.

Almighty God added, "Yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." Now, in the next place, observe how strictly he obeyed this command. When he first met Balak, he said, in the words of the text, "Lo I am come unto thee; have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." Again, when he was

[2] Numb. xxii.

about to prophesy, he said, "Whatsoever He showeth me I will tell thee[3];" and he did so, in spite of Balak's disappointment and mortification to hear him bless Israel. When Balak showed his impatience, he only replied calmly, "Must I not take heed to speak that which the Lord hath put in my mouth?" Again he prophesied, and again it was a blessing; again Balak was angered, and again the prophet firmly and serenely answered, "Told not I thee, saying, All that the Lord speaketh, that I must do?" A third time he prophesied blessing; and now Balak's anger was kindled, and he smote his hands together, and bade him depart to his place. But Balaam was not thereby moved from his duty. "The wrath of a king is as messengers of death[4]." Balak might have instantly revenged himself upon the prophet; but Balaam, not satisfied with blessing Israel, proceeded, as a prophet should, to deliver himself of what remained of the prophetic burden, by foretelling more pointedly than before, destruction to Moab and the other enemies of the chosen people. He prefaced his prophecy with these unacceptable words,—"Spake I not also unto thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, If Balak would give me his house full of

[3] Numb. xxiii. [4] Prov. xvi. 14.

silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind? but what the Lord saith, that will I speak. And now behold, I go unto my people; come, therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days." After delivering his conscience, he "rose up, and went and returned to his place."

All this surely expresses the conduct and the feelings of a high-principled, honourable, conscientious man. Balaam, I say, was certainly such, in that very sense in which we commonly use those words. He said, and he did; he professed, and he acted according to his professions. There is no inconsistency in word and deed. He obeys as well as talks about religion; and, this being the case, we shall feel more intimately the value of the following noble sentiments which he lets drop from time to time, and which, if he had shown less firmness in his conduct, might have passed for mere words, the words of a maker of speeches, a sophist, moralist, or orator. "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." "God is not a man that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent . . . Behold, I have received commandment to bless; and He hath blessed, and I cannot

reverse it." "I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh." It is remarkable that these declarations are great and lofty in their mode of expression; and the saying of his recorded by the prophet Micah is of the same kind. Balak asked what sacrifices were acceptable to God. Balaam answered, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God[s]."

Viewing then the inspired notices concerning Balaam in all their parts, we cannot deny to him the praise which, if those notices have a plain meaning, they certainly do convey, that he was an honourable and religious man, with a great deal of what was great and noble about him; a man whom any one of us at first sight would have trusted, sought out in our difficulties, perhaps made the head of a party, and any how spoken of with great respect. We may indeed, if we please, say that he fell away afterwards from all this excellence; though, after all, there is something shocking in such a notion. Nay, it is not natural even that ordinarily honourable men should suddenly change; but, however, this *may* be said,—it may be said he fell away; but, I presume, it

[s] Micah vi. 8.

cannot be said that he was other than a high-principled man (in the language of the world) *when* he so spoke and acted.

But now the strange thing is, that at this very time, *while* he so spoke and acted, he seems, as in one sense to be in God's favour, so in another and higher to be under His displeasure. If this be so, the supposition that he fell away will not be in point; the difficulty it proposes to solve will remain; for it will turn out that he was displeasing to God *amid* his many excellences. The passage I have in mind is this, as you will easily suppose. "God's anger was kindled, because he went" with the princes of Moab, "and the Angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him." Afterwards, when God opened his eyes, "he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand" ... "And Balaam said, I have *sinned*, for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me; now, therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again." You observe Balaam said, "I have sinned," *though* he avers he did not *know* that God was his adversary. What makes the whole transaction the more strange is this,—that Almighty God had said before, "If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them;" and that when Balaam offered to go back again, the Angel repeated, "Go with

the men." And afterwards we find in the midst of his heathen enchantments "God met Balaam," and "put a word in his mouth;" and afterwards "the Spirit of God came unto him."

Summing up then what has been said, we seem, in Balaam's history, to have the following remarkable case, that is remarkable, according to our customary judgment of things: a man divinely favoured, visited, influenced, guided, protected, eminently honoured, illuminated,—a man possessed of an enlightened sense of duty, and of moral and religious acquirements, educated, high-minded, conscientious, honourable, firm; and yet on the side of God's enemies, personally under God's displeasure, and in the end (if we go on to that) the direct instrument of Satan, and having his portion with the unbelievers. I do not think I have materially overstated any part of this description; but if it be correct only in substance, it certainly is most fearful, after allowing for incidental exaggeration,—most fearful to every one of us, the more fearful the more we are conscious to ourselves in the main of purity of intention in what we do, and conscientious adherence to our sense of duty.

And now it is natural to ask, what is the *meaning* of this startling exhibition of God's ways? Is it really possible that a conscientious and religious

man should be found among the enemies of God, nay, should be personally displeasing to Him, and that at the very time God was visiting him with extraordinary favour? What a mystery is this! Surely, if this be so, revelation has added to our perplexities, not relieved them! What instruction, what profit, what correction, what doctrine is there in such portions of inspired Scripture?

In answering this difficulty, I observe, in the first place, that it certainly is impossible, quite impossible, that a really conscientious man should be displeasing to God; at the same time it is possible to be *generally* conscientious, or what the world calls honourable and high-principled, yet to be destitute of that religious fear and strictness, which God calls conscientiousness, but which the world calls superstition or narrowness of mind. And bearing this in mind, we shall, perhaps, have a solution of our perplexities concerning Balaam.

And here I would make a remark; that when a passage of Scripture, descriptive of God's dealings with man, is obscure or perplexing, it is as well to ask ourselves whether this may not be owing to some insensibility in ourselves or in our age, to certain peculiarities of the Divine law or government therein involved. Thus, to those who do

not understand the nature and history of religious truth, our Lord's assertion about sending a sword on earth is an obscurity. To those who consider sin a light evil, the doctrine of eternal punishment is a difficulty. In like manner the history of the flood, of the call of Abraham, of the plagues of Egypt, of the wandering in the desert, of the judgment on Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and a multitude of other occurrences, may be insuperable difficulties, except to certain states and tempers of mind, to which, on the contrary, they will seem quite natural and obvious. I consider that the history of Balaam is a striking illustration of this remark. Those whose hearts, like Josiah, are "tender," scrupulous, sensitive in religious matters, will see with clearness and certainty what the real state of the case was as regards him; on the other hand, our difficulties about it, if we have them, are a presumption that the age we live in has not the key to a certain class of Divine providences, is deficient in a certain class of religious principles, ideas, and sensibilities. Let it be considered then whether the following remarks may not tend to lessen our perplexity.

Balaam obeyed God from a sense of its being *right* to do so, but not from a *desire to please Him*, from *fear and love*. He had other ends, aims, wishes of his own, distinct from God's will and

purpose, and he would have effected these if he could. His endeavour was, not to please God, but to please self without displeasing God; to pursue his own ends *as far* as was consistent with his duty. In a word, he did not give his heart to God, but obeyed Him, as a man may obey human law, or observe the usages of society or his country, as something external to himself, because he knows he ought to do so, from a sort of rational good sense, a conviction of its propriety, expediency, or comfort, as the case may be.

You will observe he *wished* to go with Balak's messengers, only he felt he *ought not* to go; and the problem which he attempted to solve was *how* to go and yet not offend God. He was quite resolved he *would* any how act religiously and conscientiously; he was too honourable a man to break any of his engagements; if he had given his word, it was sacred; if he had duties, they were imperative: he had a character to maintain, and an inward sense of propriety to satisfy; but he would have given the world to have got rid of his duties; and the question was, *how* to do so without violence; and he did not care about walking on the very brink of transgression, so that he could keep from falling over. Accordingly he was not content with *ascertaining* God's will,

but he attempted to *change* it. He inquired of Him a *second time*, and this was to tempt Him. Hence, while God bade him go, His anger was kindled against him because he went.

This surely is no uncommon character, rather it is the common case even with the more respectable and praiseworthy portion of the community. I say plainly, and without fear of contradiction, though it is a serious thing to say, that the aim of most men esteemed conscientious and religious, or who are what is called honourable, upright men, is, to all appearance, not how to please God, but how to please themselves without displeasing Him. I say confidently, that is, if we may judge of men in general by what we see, that they make this world the first object in their minds, and use religion as a corrective, a restraint, upon *too much* attachment to the world. They think that religion is a negative thing, a sort of moderate love of the world, a moderate luxury, a moderate avarice, a moderate ambition, and a moderate selfishness. You see this in numberless ways. You see it in the course of trade, of public life, of literature, in all matters where men have objects to pursue. Nay, you see it in religious exertions; of which it too commonly happens that the chief aim is, to attain *any how* a certain definite end, religious indeed, but of man's own choosing; not, to please

God, and *next*, if possible, to attain it; not, to attain it religiously, or not at all.

This surely is so plain that it is scarcely necessary to enlarge upon it. Men do not take for the object towards which they act, God's will, but certain maxims, rules, or measures, right perhaps as far as they go, but defective because they admit of being subjected to certain other ultimate ends, which are not religious. Men are just, honest, upright, trustworthy; but all this not from the love and fear of God, but from a mere feeling of obligation to be so, and in subjection to certain worldly objects. And thus they are what is popularly called moral, without being religious. Such was Balaam. He was in a popular sense a strictly moral, honourable, conscientious man; that he was not so in a heavenly and true sense is plain, if not from the considerations here insisted on, at least from his after history, which (we may presume) brought to light his secret defect, in whatever it consisted.

And here we see why he spoke so much and so vauntingly of his determination to follow God's direction. He made a great *point* of following it; his end was not to please God, but to keep straight with Him. He who loves does not act from calculation or reasoning; he does not in his cool moments reflect upon or talk of what he is

doing, as if it were a great sacrifice. Much less does he pride himself on it; but this is what Balaam seems to have done.

I have been observing that his defect lay in this, that he had not a single eye towards God's will, but was ruled by other objects. But moreover, this evil heart of unbelief showed itself in a peculiar way, to which it is necessary to draw your attention, and to which I alluded just now in saying that the difficulties of Scripture often arose from the defective moral condition of our hearts.

Why did Almighty God give Balaam leave to go to Balak, and then was angry with him for going? I suppose for this reason, because his asking twice was tempting God. God is a jealous God. Sinners as we are, nay as creatures of His hands, we may not safely intrude upon Him, and make free with Him. We may not dare to do that, which we should not dare to do with an earthly superior, which we should be punished, for instance, for attempting, in the case of a king or noble of this world. To rush into His presence, to address Him familiarly, to urge Him, to strive to make our duty lie in one direction when it lies in another, to handle rudely and practise upon His holy word, to trifle with truth, to treat conscience lightly, to take liberties (as it may be called) with any thing that is God's, all irre-

verence, profaneness, unscrupulousness, wantonness, is represented in Scripture not only as a sin, but as felt, noticed, quickly returned on God's part, (if I may dare use such human words of the Almighty and All-holy God, without transgressing the rule I am myself laying down,—but He vouchsafes in Scripture to represent Himself to us in that only way in which we can attain to the knowledge of Him), I say all irreverence towards God is represented as being jealously and instantly and fearfully noticed and visited, as friend or stranger among men might resent an insult shown him. This should be carefully considered; we are apt to act towards God and the things of God as towards a mere system, a law, a name, a religion, a principle, not as against a Person, a living, watchful, present, prompt and powerful eye and arm. That all this is a great error, is plain to all who study Scripture; as is sufficiently shown by the death of 50,070 persons for looking into the ark—the death of the Prophet by the lion, who was sent to Jeroboam from Judah, and did not minutely obey his instructions—the slaughter of the children at Bethel by the bears, for mocking Elisha—the exclusion of Moses from the promised land, for smiting the rock twice—and the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira. Now Balaam's fault seems to have been of this nature. God told

him distinctly not to go to Balak. He was rash enough to ask a second time, and God as a punishment gave him leave to ally himself with His enemies, and to take part against His people. With this presumptuousness and love of self in his innermost heart, his prudence, firmness, wisdom, illumination, and general conscientiousness, availed him nothing.

A number of reflections crowd upon the mind on the review of this awful history, as I may well call it; and with a brief notice of some of these I shall conclude.

1. First, we see how little we can depend, in judging of right and wrong, on the apparent excellence and high character of individuals. There *is* a right and a wrong in matters of conduct, in spite of the world; but it is the world's aim and Satan's aim to take our minds off from the indelible distinctions of things, and to fix our thoughts upon man, to make us the slaves of man, to make us dependent on his opinion, his patronage, his honour, his smiles and his frowns. But if Scripture is to be our guide, it is quite plain that the most conscientious, religious, high-principled, honourable men, (I use the words in their ordinary, not in their Scripture sense,) may be on the side of evil, may be Satan's instruments in cursing, if that were possible, and at least in seducing and

enfeebling the people of God. For in the world's judgment, even when most refined, a person is conscientious and consistent, who acts up to his standard, *whatever that is*, not he only who aims at taking the highest standard. This indeed is the world's highest flight; but in its ordinary judgment a man is conscientious and consistent, who is only inconsistent and goes against conscience in any extremity, when hardly beset, and when he must cut the knot or remain in present difficulties. That is, *he* is thought to obey conscience, who only disobeys it when it is a praise and merit to obey it. This, alas! is the way with some of the most honourable of mere men of the world, nay of the mass of (so called) respectable men. They never tell untruths, or break their word, or profane the Lord's day, or are dishonest in trade, or falsify their principles, or insult religion, except in very great straits or great emergencies, when driven into a corner; and then perhaps they force themselves, as Saul did when he offered sacrifice instead of Samuel;—they force themselves, and (as it were) undergo their sin as a sort of unpleasant self-denial or penance, being ashamed of it all the while, getting it over as quickly as they can, shutting their eyes and leaping blindfold, and then forgetting it, as something which is bitter to think about. And if memory is ever roused and annoys

them, they console themselves that after all they have only gone against their conscience now and then. This is their view of themselves and of each other, taken at advantage; and if any one come across them who has lived more out of the world than themselves, and has a truer sense of right and wrong, and who fastens on some one point in them, which to his mind is a token and warning to himself against them, such a one seems of course narrow-minded and overstrict in his notions. For instance; supposing some such man had fallen in with Balaam, and had been privy to the history of his tempting God, it is clear that Balaam's general correctness, his nobleness of demeanour, and his enlightened view of duty, would not have availed one jot or tittle to overcome such a man's repugnance to him. He would have been startled and alarmed, and would have kept at a distance, and in consequence he would have been called by the world uncharitable and bigoted.

2. A second reflection which rises in the mind has relation to the wonderful secret providence of God, while all things seem to go on according to the course of this world. Balaam did not see the Angel, yet the Angel went out against him as an adversary. He had no open denunciation of God's wrath directed against him. He had sinned, and

nothing happened outwardly, but wrath was abroad and in his path. *This* again is a very serious and awful thought. God's arm is not shortened. What happened to Balaam is as if it took place yesterday. God is what He ever was; we sin as man has ever sinned. We sin without being aware of it. God is our enemy without our being aware of it; and when the blow falls, we turn our thoughts to the creature, we ill-treat our ass, we lay the blame on circumstances of this world, instead of turning to Him. "Lord, when Thy hand is lifted up, they will not see; but they shall see," in the next world if not here, "and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea the fire of Thine enemies shall devour them [6]."

3. Here too is a serious reflection, if we had time to pursue it, that when we have begun an evil course, we cannot retrace our steps. Balaam was forced to go with the men; he offered to draw back—he was not allowed—yet God's wrath followed him. This is what comes of committing ourselves to an evil line of conduct; and we see daily instances of it in our experience of life. Men get entangled, and are bound hand and foot in dangerous courses. They make imprudent marriages or connexions; they place themselves in

[6] Isaiah xxvi. 11.

dangerous situations; they engage in unprofitable or harmful undertakings. Too often indeed they do not discern their evil plight; but when they do, they cannot draw back. God seems to say, "Go with the men." They are in bondage, and they must make the best of it; being the slave of the creature, without ceasing to be the responsible servants of God; under His displeasure, yet bound to act as if they could please Him. All this is very fearful.

4. Lastly, I will but say this in addition,—God gives us warnings now and then, but does not repeat them. Balaam's sin consisted in not acting upon what was told him *once for all.* In like manner, you, my brethren, now hear what you may never hear again, and what perchance in its substance is the word of God. You may never hear it again, though with your outward ears you hear it a hundred times, because you may be impressed with it now, but never may again. You may be impressed with it now, and the impression may die away; and sometime hence, if you ever think about it, you may then speak of it thus,—that the view struck you at the time, but somehow the more you thought about it, the less you liked or valued it. True; this *may* be so, and it *may* arise, as you think, from the doctrine I have been setting before you not being true and scriptural;

but it *may* also arise from your having heard God's voice and not obeyed it. It may be that you have become blind, not the doctrine been disproved. Beware of trifling with your conscience. It is often said that second thoughts are best; so they are in matters of judgment, but not in matters of conscience. In matters of duty first thoughts are commonly best—they have more in them of the voice of God. May He give you grace so to hear what has been said, as you will wish to have heard, when life is over; to hear in a practical way, with a desire to profit by it, to learn God's will, and to do it!

SERMON XXI.

CHRISTIAN REVERENCE.

PSALM ii. 11.

"Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling."

WHY did Christ show Himself to so few witnesses after He rose from the dead? Because *He was a King*, a King exalted upon God's "Holy hill of Zion;" as the Psalm says which contains the text. Kings do not court the multitude, or show themselves as a spectacle at the will of others. They are the rulers of their people, and have their state as such, and are reverently waited on by their great men: and when they show themselves, they do so out of their condescension. They act by means of their servants, and must be *sought* by those who would gain favours from them.

Christ, in like manner, when exalted as the Only-begotten Son of God, did not mix with the Jewish people, as in the days of His humiliation. He rose from the grave in secret, and taught in

secret forty days, because "the government was upon His shoulder." He was no longer a servant, washing His disciples' feet, and dependent on the wayward will of the multitude. He was the acknowledged Heir of all things. His throne was established by a divine decree; and those who desired His salvation, were bound to *seek* His face. Yet not even by those who sought was He at once found. He did not permit the world to approach Him rashly, or curiously to gaze on Him. Those only did He call beside Him who had been His friends, who loved Him. Those only He bade "ascend the hill of the Lord," who had "clean hands and a pure heart, who had not worshipped vanity nor sworn deceitfully." These drew near, and "saw the Lord God of Israel," and so were fitted to bear the news of Him to the people at large. *He* remained "in His holy temple;" *they* from Him proclaimed the tidings of His resurrection, and of His mercy, His free pardon offered to all men, and the promises of grace and glory which His death had procured for all who believe.

Thus are we taught to serve our risen Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Let us pursue the subject thus opened upon us.—Christ's second sojourn on earth (after His resurrection) was *in secret*. The time had been when He "preached openly in the synagogues," and in the public

ways; and openly wrought miracles such as man never did. Was there to be no end of His labours in our behalf? His *death* "finished" them; afterwards He taught His *followers* only. Who shall complain of His withdrawing Himself at last from the world, when it was of His own spontaneous loving-kindness that He ever showed Himself at all?

Yet it must be borne in mind, that even before He entered into His glory, Christ spoke and acted as a King. It must not be supposed that, even in the days of His flesh, He could forget who He was, or "behave Himself unseemly" by any weak submission to the will of the Jewish people. Even in the lowest acts of His self-abasement, still He showed His greatness. Consider His conduct when He washed St. Peter's feet, and see if it were not calculated (assuredly it was) to humble, to awe, and subdue, the very person to whom He ministered. When He taught, warned, pitied, prayed for, His ignorant hearers, He never allowed them to relax their reverence or to overlook His condescension. Nay, He did not allow them to praise Him aloud, and publish His acts of grace; as if what is called popularity would be a dishonour to His holy name, and the applause of men would imply their right to censure. The world's praise is akin to contempt. Our Lord

delights in the tribute of the secret heart. Such was His conduct in the days of His flesh. Does it not interpret His dealings with us after His resurrection? He who was so reserved in His communications of Himself, even when He came to minister, much more would withdraw Himself from the eyes of men when He was exalted over all things.

I have said, that even when a servant, Christ spoke with the authority of a king; and have given you some proof of it. But it may be well to dwell upon this. Observe then, the difference between His promises, stated doctrinally and generally, and His mode of addressing those who were actually before Him. While He announced God's willingness to forgive *all* repentant sinners, in all fulness of loving-kindness and tender mercy, yet He did not use supplication to these persons or those, whatever their number or their rank might be. He spoke as one who knew He had great favours to confer, and had nothing to gain from those who received them. Far from urging them to accept His bounty, He showed Himself even backward to confer it, inquired into their knowledge and motives, and cautioned them against entering His service without counting the cost of it. Thus sometimes He even repelled men from Him.

For instance: When there went "great multitudes with Him .... He turned and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." These were not the words of one who courted popularity. He proceeds;—"Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? ... So likewise, whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple[1]." On the other hand, observe His conduct to the powerful men, and the learned Scribes and Pharisees. There are persons who look up to human power, and who are pleased to associate their names with the accomplished and cultivated of this world. Our blessed Lord was as inflexible towards these, as towards the crowds which followed Him. They asked for a sign; He named them "an evil and adulterous generation," who refused to profit by what they had already received[2]. They asked Him, whether He did not confess Himself to be one with God; but He, rather than tell such proud disputers, seemed even to abandon His own real claim, and

[1] Luke xiv. 25—33. [2] Matt. xii. 39. xxi. 23—27.

made His former clear words ambiguous[3]. Such was the King of Israel in the eyes both of the multitude and of their rulers; a "hard saying," a "rock of offence even to the disobedient," who came to Him "with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him." Continue this survey to the case of individuals, and it will still appear, that, loving and merciful as He was most abundantly, yet that He showed both His power and His grace with reserve, even to them, as well as to the fickle many, or the unbelieving Pharisees.

One instance is preserved to us of a person addressing Him, with some notions, indeed, of His greatness, but in a light and careless tone. The narrative is instructive from the mixture of good and bad which the inquirer's character displays[4]. He was young, and wealthy, and is called "a ruler;" yet was anxious for Christ's favour. So far was well. Nay, he "came running, and kneeled to Him." And he *seemed* to address Him in what would generally be considered as respectful terms: "Good Master," he said. Yet our Saviour saw in his conduct a deficiency;—"One thing thou lackest:" viz. *devotion* in the true sense of the word,—a giving himself up to Christ. This young man seems to

[3] John x. 30—37.

[4] Matt. xix. 16—22. Mark x. 17—22. Luke xviii. 18—23.

have considered religion as an easy work, and thought he could live as the world, and yet serve God acceptably. In consequence, we may suppose, he had little right notion of the dignity of a Messenger from God. He did not associate the Ministers of religion with awful prospects beyond the grave, in which he was interested; nor *reverence* them accordingly, though he was not without some kind of *respect* for them. Doubtless he thought he was *honouring* our Lord when he called Him "*Good Master;*" and would have been surprised to hear his attachment to sacred subjects and appointments called in question. Yet our Saviour rejected such half homage, and rebuked what even seemed piously offered.—"*Why* callest thou Me good?" He asked; "There is none good but One, that is, God;" as if He said, "Observest thou *what* words thou art using as words of course? '*good Master*'—am I accounted by thee as a teacher of man's creation, and over whom man has power, and accosted by a form of honour, which, through length of time, has lost its meaning; or am I acknowledged to come and have authority from Him who is the only source of goodness?" Nor did our Lord relax His severity even after this reproof. Expressly as it is told us, "*He loved him,*" and spoke to him therefore in great compassion and mercy,

yet He strictly charged him to sell all he had and give it away, if he would show he was in earnest, and He sent him away "sorrowful."

You may recollect, too, our Lord's frequent inquiry into *the faith* of those who came to Him. This arose, doubtless, from the same rule,—a regard to His own Majesty as a King. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth[1]." He did not work miracles as a mere display of power; or allow the world profanely to look on as at some exhibition of art. In this respect, as in others, even Moses and Elias stand in contrast with Him. Moses wrought miracles before Pharaoh to rival the magicians of Egypt. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to bring down fire from heaven. The Son of God deigned not to exert His power before Herod, after Moses' pattern; nor to be judged by the multitude, as Elijah. He subdued the power of Satan at His own seasons; but when the Devil tempted Him and demanded a miracle in proof of His Divinity, He would do none.

Further, even when an inquirer showed earnestness, still He did not try to gain Him over by smooth representations of His doctrine. He declared, indeed, the general characteristic of His

[1] Mark ix. 23.

doctrine, "My yoke is easy;" but "He made Himself strange, and spake roughly" to those who came to Him. Nicodemus was another ruler of the Jews, who sought Him, and he professed his belief in His miracles and Divine mission. Our Saviour answered in these severe words;—"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Such was our Saviour's conduct even during the period of His ministry; much more might we expect it to be such, when He was risen from His state of servitude, and such we find it.

No man saw Him rise from the grave. His Angels indeed beheld it; but His earthly followers were away, and the heathen soldiers were not worthy. They saw, indeed, the great Angel, who rolled away the stone from the opening of the tomb. This was Christ's servant; but Him they saw not. *He* was on His way to see His own faithful and mourning followers. To these He had revealed His doctrine during His humiliation, and called them "His friends[6]." First of all, He appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden itself where He had been buried; then to the other women who ministered unto Him; then

[6] Matt. xiii. 11. John xv. 15.

to the two disciples travelling to Emmaus; then to all the Apostles separately; besides, to Peter and to James, and to Thomas in the presence of them all. Yet not even these, His friends, had free access to Him. He said to Mary, "Touch Me not." He came and left them according to His own pleasure. When they saw Him, they felt an awe which they had not felt during His ministry. While they doubted if it were He, "None of them," St. John says, "durst ask Him, Who art Thou? believing that it was the Lord[7]." However, as kings have their days of state, on which they show themselves publicly to their subjects, so our Lord appointed a meeting of His disciples, when they might see Him. He had determined this even before His crucifixion; and the Angels reminded them of it. "He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you[8]." The place of meeting was a mountain; the same (it is supposed) on which He had been transfigured; and the number who saw Him there was five hundred at once, if we join St. Paul's account to that in the Gospels. At length, after forty days, He was taken from them; He ascended up, "and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Are *we* to feel less humble veneration for Him

[7] John xxi. 12. [8] Mark xvi. 7.

now, than His Apostles then? Though He is our Saviour, and has removed all slavish fear of death and judgment, are we, therefore, to make light of the prospect before us, as if we were sure of that reward which He bids us struggle for? Assuredly, we are still to "serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with reverence,"—to "kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and so we perish from the right way, if His wrath be kindled, yea but a little." In a Christian's course, *fear and love must go together.* And this is the lesson to be deduced from our Saviour's withdrawing from the world after His resurrection. He showed His love for men by dying for them, and rising again. He maintained His honour and great glory by retiring from them, when His merciful purpose was attained, that they might seek Him if they would find Him. He ascended to His Father out of our sight. Sinners would be ill company for the exalted King of Saints. When we have been duly prepared to see Him, we shall be given to approach Him.

In heaven, love will absorb fear; but in this world, *fear and love must go together.* No one can love God aright without fearing Him; though many fear Him, and yet do not love Him. Self-confident men, who do not know their own hearts, or the reasons they have for being dissatisfied

with themselves, do not fear God, and they think this bold freedom is to love Him. Deliberate sinners fear but cannot love Him. But devotion to Him consists in love and fear, as we may understand from our ordinary attachment to each other. No one really loves another, who does not feel a certain reverence towards him. When friends transgress this sobriety of affection, they may indeed continue associates for a time, but they have broken the bond of union. It is mutual respect which makes friendship lasting. So again, in the feelings of inferiors towards superiors. Fear must go before love. Till he who has authority shows he has it and can use it, his forbearance will not be valued duly; his kindness will look like weakness. We learn to contemn what we do not fear; and we cannot love what we contemn. So in religion also. We cannot understand Christ's mercies till we understand His power, His glory, His unspeakable holiness, and our demerits; that is, until we first fear Him. Not that fear comes first, and then love; for the most part they will proceed together. Fear is allayed by the love of Him, and our love sobered by our fear of Him. Thus He draws us on with encouraging voice amid the terrors of His threatenings. As in the young ruler's case, He loves us, yet speaks harshly to us that we may learn

to cherish mixed feelings towards Him. He hides Himself from us, and yet calls us on, that we may hear His voice as Samuel did, and, believing, approach Him with trembling. This may seem strange to those who do not study the Scriptures, and to those who do not know what it is earnestly to seek after God. But in proportion as the state of mind is strange, so is there in it, therefore, untold and surpassing pleasure to those who partake it. The bitter and the sweet, strangely tempered, thus leave upon the mind the lasting taste of Divine Truth, and satisfy it; not so harsh as to be loathed; nor of that insipid sweetness which attends enthusiastic feelings, and is wearisome when it becomes familiar. Such is the feeling of conscience too, God's original gift; how painful! yet who would lose it! "I opened my mouth and panted, for I longed for Thy commandments [9]." This is David's account of it. Ezekiel describes something of the same feeling, when the Spirit lifted him up and took him away, "and he went in bitterness, in the heat of his spirit," "the hand of the Lord" being "strong upon him [1]."

Now how does this apply to us here assembled? Are we in danger of speaking or thinking of

[9] Psalm cxix. 131. [1] Ezek. iii. 14.

Christ irreverently? I do not think we are in any immediate danger of deliberate profaneness; but we are in great danger of this, viz. first, of allowing ourselves to appear profane, and secondly, of gradually becoming irreverent, while we are pretending to be so. Men do not begin by *intending* to dishonour God; but they are afraid of the ridicule of others: they are ashamed of appearing religious; and thus are led to pretend that they are worse than they really are. They say things which they do not mean; and, by a miserable weakness, allow actions and habits to be imputed to them which they dare not really indulge in. Hence, they affect a liberty of speech which only befits the companions of evil spirits. They take God's name in vain, to show that they can do what devils do; and they invoke the evil spirit, or speak familiarly of all that pertains to him, and deal about curses wantonly, as though they were not firebrands,—as if acknowledging the Author of Evil to be their great master and lord. Yes! he *is* a master who allows himself to be served without trembling. It is his very art to lead men to be at ease with him, to think lightly of him, and to trifle with him. He will submit to their ridicule, take (as it were) their blows, and pretend to be their slave, that he may ensnare them. *He* has no dignity to maintain, and he waits his time

when his malice shall be gratified. So it has ever been all over the earth. Among all nations it has been his aim to make men laugh at him; going to and fro upon the earth, and walking up and down in it, hearing and rejoicing in that light perpetual talk about him, which is his *worship*.

Now, it is not to be supposed that all this careless language can be continued without its affecting a man's heart at last; and this is the second danger I spoke of. Through a false shame, we disown religion with our lips, and next our words affect our thoughts. Men at last become the cold, indifferent, profane characters they professed themselves to be. They think contemptuously of God's Ministers, Sacraments, and Worship; they slight His word, rarely looking into it, and never studying it. They undervalue all religious profession, and, judging of others by themselves, impute the conscientious conduct they witness to bad motives. Thus they are in heart infidels; though they may not formally be such, and may attempt to disguise their own unbelief under pretence of objecting to one or other of the doctrines or ordinances of religion. And should a time of temptation come, when it would be *safe* to show themselves as they really are, they will (almost unawares) throw off their profession of Christianity, and join themselves to the scoffing world.

And how must Christians, on the other hand, treat such heartless men? They have our Lord's example to imitate. Not that they dare precisely follow the conduct of Him who had no sin. They dare not assume to themselves any honour on their own account; and they are bound, especially if they are His Ministers, to humble themselves as the Apostles did, and "going out to the highways and hedges, (as it were) compel[2]" men to be saved. Yet, while they use greater earnestness of entreaty than their Lord, they must not forget His dignity the while, who sends them. He manifested His love towards us, "in deed and in truth," and we, His Ministers, declare it in word; yet for the very reason that it is so abundant, we must in very gratitude learn reverence towards Him. We must not take advantage (so to say) of His goodness; or misuse the powers committed to us. Never must we solicitously press the truth upon those who do not profit by what they already possess. It dishonours Christ, while it does the scorner harm, not good. It is casting pearls before swine. We must wait for all opportunities of being useful to men, but beware of attempting too much at once. We must impart the Scripture doctrines, in measure and season, as they can bear them; not being eager to recount them all, rather,

[2] Luke xiv. 23.

hiding them from the world. Seldom must we engage in controversy or dispute; for it lowers the sacred truths to make them a subject for ordinary debate. Common propriety suggests rules like these at once. Who would speak freely about some revered friend in the presence of those who did not value him? or who would think he could with a few words overcome their indifference towards him? or who would hastily dispute about him when his hearers had no desire to be made love him?

Rather, shunning all intemperate words, let us show our light before men by our *works*. Here we must be safe. In doing justice, showing mercy, speaking the truth, resisting sin, obeying the Church,—in thus glorifying God, there can be no irreverence. And, above all, let us look at home, check all bad thoughts, presumptuous imaginings, vain desires, discontented murmurings, self-complacent reflections, and so in our hearts ever honour Him in secret, whom we reverence by open profession.

May God guide us in a dangerous world, and deliver us from evil. And may He rouse to serious thought, by the power of His Spirit, all who are living in profaneness or unconcern!

SERMON XXII.

A PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE AS REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL.

GEN. xvi. 13.

"Thou God seest me."

WHEN Hagar fled into the wilderness from the face of her mistress, she was visited by an Angel, who sent her back; but, together with this implied reproof of her impatience, gave her a word of promise to encourage and console her. In the mixture of humbling and cheerful thoughts thus wrought in her, she recognized the presence of her Maker and Lord, who ever comes to His servants in a two-fold aspect, severe because He is holy, yet soothing as abounding in mercy. In consequence, she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, "Thou God seest me."

Such was the condition of man before Christ came, favoured with some occasional notices of God's regard for individuals, but, for the most

part, instructed merely in His general Providence, as seen in the course of human affairs. In this respect even the Law was deficient, though it abounded in proofs that God was a living, all-seeing, all-recompensing, God. It was deficient, in comparison of the Gospel, in evidence of the really existing relation between each soul of man and its Maker, independently of every thing else in the world. Of Moses, indeed, it is said, that "the Lord spake unto him *face to face*, as a man speaketh unto his friend [1]." But this was an especial privilege vouchsafed to him only and some others, as to Hagar, who records it in the text, not to all the people. But, under the New Covenant, this distinct regard, vouchsafed by Almighty God to every one of us, is clearly revealed. It was foretold of the Christian Church; "*All* thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children [2]." When the Eternal Son came on earth in our flesh, men saw their invisible Maker and Judge. He showed Himself no longer through the mere powers of nature, or the maze of human affairs, but in our own likeness. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the

[1] Exod. xxxiii. 11. [2] Is. liv. 13.

glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ;" that is, in a sensible form, as a really existing individual being. And, at the same time, He forthwith began to speak to *us* as individuals. He, on the one hand, addressed each of us on the other. Thus it was in some sense a revelation face to face.

This is the subject on which I propose now to make a few remarks. And first, let me observe, it is very difficult, in spite of the revelation made us in the Gospel, to master the idea of this particular providence of God. If we allow ourselves to float down the current of the world, living as other men, gathering up our notions of religion here and there, as it may be, we have little or no true comprehension of a particular Providence. We conceive that Almighty God works on a large plan; but we cannot realize the wonderful truth that He sees and thinks of individuals. We cannot believe He is really present every where, that He is wherever we are, though unseen. For instance, we can understand, or think we understand, that He was present on Mount Sinai,—or within the Jewish Temple,—or that He clave the ground under Dathan and Abiram. But we do not in any sufficient sense believe that He is in

[3] 2 Cor. iv. 6.

like manner "about *our* path, and about *our* bed, and spieth out all *our* ways[4]." We cannot bring ourselves to get fast hold of the solemn fact that He sees what is going on among ourselves at this moment; that this man falls and that man is exalted, at His silent, invisible appointment. We use, indeed, the prayers of the Church, and intercede, not only for all conditions of men, but for the King and the Nobility, and the Court of Parliament, and so on, down to individual sick people in our own parish; yet, in spite of all this, we do not bring home to us the truth of His omniscience. We know He is in heaven, and forget that He is also on earth. This is the reason why the multitude of men are so profane: they use light words; they scoff at religion; they allow themselves to be lukewarm and indifferent; they take the part of wicked men; they push forward wicked measures; they defend injustice, or cruelty, or sacrilege, or infidelity; because they have no grasp of a truth, which nevertheless they have no intention to deny, that God sees them. There is, indeed, a self-will, and self-deceit, which would sin on even in God's visible presence. This was the sin of Balaam, who took part with the enemies of Israel for reward; and of Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of the

[4] Ps. cxxxix. 2.

Simeonites, on whom Phineas did judgment; and such the sin of Saul, of Judas, of Ananias and Sapphira. Alas! doubtless such is the sin of many a man now in England, unless human nature is other than it was aforetime; alas! such a sin is in a measure our own from time to time, as any one may know for certain who is used to self-examination. Yet, over and above this, certainly there is also a great deal of profane sinning from our *forgetting*, not comprehending that we are in God's presence; not comprehending, or (in other words) believing, that He sees and hears and notes down every thing we do.

This, again, is often the state in which persons find themselves on falling into trouble. The world fails them, and they despair, because they do not realize to themselves the loving-kindness and the presence of God. They find no comfort in a truth which to them is not a substance but an opinion. Therefore it was that Hagar, when visited in the wilderness by the Angel, called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, "Thou God seest me!" It came as a new truth to her that, amid her trouble and her waywardness, the eye of God was upon her. The case is the same now. Men talk in a general way of the goodness of God, His benevolence, compassion, and long-suffering; but they think of it as of a flood pouring itself out all

through the world; as the light of the sun, not as the continually repeated action of an intelligent and living Mind, contemplating whom it visits and intending what it effects. Accordingly, when they come into trouble, they can but say, "It is all for the best—God is good:" and the like; and it all falls as cold comfort upon them, and does not lessen their sorrow, because they have not accustomed their minds to feel that He is a merciful God, regarding them individually, and not a mere universal Providence acting by general laws. And then, perhaps, all of a sudden the true notion breaks on them, as it did upon Hagar. Some especial Providence, amid their infliction, runs right into their heart; brings it close home to them, in a way they never experienced before, that God sees them. And then, surprised at this, which is a something quite new to them, they go into the other extreme, in proportion to their former apathy; and are led to think that they are especial objects of God's love, more than all other men. Instead of taking what has happened to them as an evidence of His particular Providence over all, as revealed in Scripture, they still will not believe a jot or tittle more than they see; and, while discovering He loves them individually, they do not advance one step, on that account, to the general truth, that He loves other men individually also. Now had they been

all along in the practice of studying Scripture, they would have been saved from both errors ;—their first, which was blindness to a particular Providence altogether ;—their second, which was a narrow-minded limiting of it to themselves, as if the world at large were rejected and reprobate ; for Scripture represents it as the portion of all men one by one.

I suppose it is scarcely necessary to prove to those who have allowed their minds to dwell on the Gospels, that the peculiar character of our Lord's goodness, as displayed therein, is its tenderness and its considerateness. These qualities are the very perfection of kindness between man and man ; but, from the very extent and complication of the world's system, and from its Maker's being invisible, our imagination scarcely succeeds in attributing them to Him, even when our reason is convinced, and we wish to believe accordingly. His Providence manifests itself in general laws, it moves forward upon the lines of truth and justice ; it has no respect of persons, rewarding the good and punishing the bad, not as individuals, but according to their character. How shall He who is Most Holy direct His love to this man or that for his own sake, contemplating us one by one, without infringing on His own perfections ? Or even were the Supreme Being a God of unmixed

benevolence, how, even then, shall the thought of Him come home to our minds with that constraining power which the kindness of a human friend exerts over us? The greatest acknowledgment we can make of the kindness of a superior, is to say that he acts as if he were personally interested in us. The mass of benevolent men are kind and generous, because it is their way to be so, irrespectively of the object they benefit. Natural temper, a flow of spirits, or a turn of good fortune, opens the heart, which pours itself out profusely on friend and enemy. They scatter benefits as they move along. Now, at first sight, it is difficult to see how our idea of Almighty God can be divested of these earthly notions, either that His goodness is imperfect or that it is fated and necessary; and wonderful indeed, and adorable is the condescension by which He has met our infirmity. He has met and aided it in that same Dispensation by which He redeemed our souls. In order that we may understand that in spite of His mysterious perfections He has a separate knowledge and regard for individuals, He has taken upon Him the thoughts and feelings of our own nature, which we all understand *is* capable of such personal attachments. By becoming man, He has cut short the perplexities and the discussions of our reason on the subject, as if He would grant our

objections for argument's sake, and supersede them by taking our own ground.

The most winning property of our Saviour's mercy, (if it is right so to speak of it,) is its dependence on time and place, person and circumstance; in other words, its tender discrimination. It regards and consults for each individual as he comes before it. It is called forth by some, as it is not by others, it cannot (if I may say so) manifest itself to every object alike; it has its particular shade and mode of feeling for each; and in some it is so wrapt up, as to seem to depend for its own happiness on their well-being. This might be illustrated, as is often done, by our Lord's tender behaviour towards Lazarus and his sisters, or His tears over Jerusalem; or by His conduct towards St. Peter, before and after his denial of Him, or towards St. Thomas when he doubted, or by His love of His mother, or of St. John. But I will direct your attention rather to His treatment of the traitor Judas; both because it is not so commonly referred to, and, also, because if there was a being in the whole world whom one might suppose cast out of His presence as hateful and reprobate, it was he who He foresaw would betray Him. Yet we shall find that even this wretched man was followed and encompassed by His serene though solemn regard till the very hour he betrayed Him.

Judas was in darkness and hated the light, and "went to his own place;" yet he found it, not by the mere force of certain natural principles working out their inevitable results,—by some unfeeling fate, which sentences the wicked to hell, —but by a Judge who surveys him from head to foot, who searches him through and through, to see if there is any ray of hope, any latent spark of faith; who pleads with him again and again, and, at length abandoning him, mourns over him the while with the wounded affection of a friend rather than the severity of the Judge of the whole earth. For instance, first, a startling warning a year before his trial. "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Then, when the time was come, the lowest act of abasement towards one who was soon to betray Him and to suffer the unquenchable fire. "He riseth from supper, and . . . . poureth water into a bason and began to wash the disciples' feet [5]," and Judas in the number. Then a second warning at the same time, or rather a sorrowful lament, spoken as if to Himself, "Ye are not all clean." Then openly, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." "The Son of man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by

[5] John vi. 70; xiii. 4, 5.

whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said it." Lastly, when He was actually betrayed by him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" "Judas, (He addresses him by name,) betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss[6]?" I am not attempting to reconcile His divine foreknowledge with this special and prolonged anxiety, this personal feeling towards Judas; but wish you only to observe the latter, to observe what is given us by the revelation of Almighty God in the Gospels, viz. an acquaintance with His providential regard for *individuals*, making His sun to rise on the evil as well as on the good. And, in like manner doubtless, at the last day, the wicked and impenitent shall be condemned, not in a mass, but one by one,—one by one, appearing each in his own turn before the righteous Judge, standing under the full glory of His countenance, carefully weighed in the balance and found wanting, dealt with, not indeed with a weak and wavering purpose, where God's justice claims satisfaction, yet, at the same time, with all the circumstantial solicitude and awful care of one who would fain make, if He

[6] Matt. xxvi. 24, 25. 50. Luke xxii. 48.

could, the fruit of His passion more numerous than it is.

This solemn reflection may be further enforced by considering our Lord's behaviour towards strangers who came to Him. Judas was His friend; but we have never seen Him. How will He look, and how does He look upon us? Let His manner in the Gospels towards the multitude of men assure us. All-holy, almighty as He is, and has shown Himself to be, yet in the midst of His Divine Majesty, He could display a tender interest in all who approached Him; as if He could not cast His eyes on any of His creatures without the overflowing affection of a parent for his child, regarding it with a full satisfaction, and simply desiring its happiness and highest good. Thus, when the rich young man came to Him, it is said, "And Jesus beholding him, *loved him*, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest." When the Pharisees asked a sign, "He sighed deeply in His spirit." At another time, "He looked round about on them,"—as if on every one, to see if here or there perchance there might be an exception to the general unbelief, and to condemn, one by one, those who were guilty[7],—"He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved

[7] Vide also Matt. xix. 26. Mark iii. 34. Luke xxii. 61.

for the hardness of their hearts." Again, when a leper came to Him, He did not simply heal him, but "moved with compassion, He put forth His hand[8]."

How gracious is this revelation of God's particular providence to those who seek Him! how gracious to those who have discovered that this world is but vanity, and who are solitary and isolated in themselves, whatever shadows of power and happiness surround them! The multitude, indeed, go on without these thoughts, either from insensibility, as not understanding their own wants, or changing from one idol to another, as each successively fails. But men of keener hearts would be overpowered by despondency, and would even loathe existence, did they suppose themselves under the mere operation of fixed laws, powerless to excite the pity or the attention of Him who has appointed them. What should they do especially, who are cast among persons unable to enter into their feelings, and thus strangers to them, though by long custom ever so much friends! or have perplexities of mind they cannot explain to themselves, much less remove, and no one to help them,—or have affections and aspirations pent up within them, because they have not met with

[8] Mark x. 21. viii. 12; iii. 5; i. 41.

objects to which to devote them,—or are misunderstood by those around them, and find they have no words to set themselves right with them, or no principles in common by way of appeal,—or seem to themselves to be without place or purpose in the world, or to be in the way of others,—or have to follow their own sense of duty without advisers or supporters, nay, to resist the wishes and solicitations of superiors or relatives,—or have the burden of some painful secret, or of some incommunicable solitary grief! In all such cases the Gospel narrative supplies our very need, not simply presenting to us an unchangeable Creator to rely upon, but a compassionate Guardian, a discriminating Judge and Helper. God beholds thee individually, whoever thou art. He "calls thee by thy name." He sees thee, and understands thee, as He made thee. He knows what is in thee, all thy own peculiar feelings and thoughts, thy dispositions and likings, thy strength and thy weakness. He views thee in thy day of rejoicing and thy day of sorrow. He sympathizes in thy hopes and thy temptations. He interests Himself in all thy anxieties and remembrances, all the risings and fallings of thy spirit. He has numbered the very hairs of thy head and the cubits of thy stature. He compasses thee round and bears thee in His arms; He takes thee up

and sets thee down. He notes thy very countenance, whether smiling or in tears, whether healthful or sickly. He looks tenderly upon thy hands and thy feet; He hears thy voice, the beating of thy heart, and thy very breathing. Thou dost not love thyself better than He loves thee. Thou canst not shrink from pain more than He dislikes thy bearing it; and if He puts it on thee, it is as thou would put it on thyself, if thou art wise, for a greater good afterwards. Thou art not only His creature, (though for the very sparrows He has a care, and pitied the "much cattle" of Nineveh,) thou art man redeemed and sanctified, His adopted son, favoured with a portion of that glory and blessedness which flows from Him everlastingly unto the Only-begotten. Thou art chosen to be His, even above thy fellows who dwell in the East and South. Thou wast one of those for whom Christ offered up His last prayer, and sealed it with His precious blood. What a thought is this, a thought almost too great for our faith! Scarce can we refrain from acting Sarah's part, when we bring it before us, so as to "laugh" from amazement and perplexity. What is man, what are we, what am I, that the Son of God should be so mindful of me? What am I, that He should have raised me from almost a devil's nature to that of an Angel's? that He should have changed my soul's

original constitution, new-made me, who from my youth up have been a transgressor, and should Himself dwell personally in this very heart of mine, making me His temple? What am I, that God the Holy Ghost should enter into me, and draw up my thoughts heavenward "with plaints unutterable?"

These are the meditations which come upon the Christian to console him, while he is with Christ upon the holy mount. And, when he descends to his daily duties, they are still his inward strength, though he is not allowed to tell the vision to those around him. They make his countenance to shine, make him cheerful, collected, serene, and firm in the midst of all temptation, persecution, or bereavement. And with such thoughts before us, how base and miserable does the world appear in all its pursuits and doctrines! How truly miserable does it seem to seek good from the creature; to covet station, wealth, or credit; to choose for ourselves, in fancy, this or that mode of life; to affect the manners and fashions of the great; to spend our time in follies; to be discontented, quarrelsome, jealous or envious, censorious or resentful; fond of unprofitable talk, and eager for the news of the day; busy about public matters which concern us not; hot in the cause of this or that interest or party; or set upon gain; or

devoted to the increase of barren knowledge! And at the end of our days, when flesh and heart fail, what will be our consolation, though we have made ourselves rich, or have served an office, or been the first man among our equals, or have depressed a rival, or managed things our own way, or have settled splendidly, or have been intimate with the great, or have fared sumptuously, or have gained a name! Say, even if we obtain that which lasts longest, a place in history, yet, after all, what ashes shall we have eaten for bread! And, in that awful hour, when death is in sight, will He, whose eye is now so loving towards us, and whose hand falls on us so gently, will He acknowledge us any more? or, if He still speaks, will His voice have any power to stir us? rather will it not repel us as it did Judas, by the very tenderness with which it would invite us to Him?

Let us then endeavour, by His grace, rightly to understand where we stand, and what He is towards us; most tender and pitiful, yet, for all His pity, not passing by the breadth of a single hair the eternal lines of truth, holiness, and justice; He who can condemn to the woe everlasting, though He weeps and laments beforehand, and who, when once the sentence of condemnation has gone forth, will wipe out altogether the re-

membrance of us, "and know us not." The tares were "bound in bundles" for the burning, indiscriminately, promiscuously, contemptuously. "Let us then fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of us should seem to come short of it."

SERMON XXIII.

THE DANGER OF RICHES.

LUKE vi. 24.

"Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation."

UNLESS we were accustomed to read the New Testament from our childhood, I think we should be very much struck with the warnings which it contains, not only against the love of riches, but the very possession of them; we should wonder with a portion of that astonishment which the Apostles at first felt, who had been brought up in the notion that they were a chief reward which God bestowed on those He loved. As it is, we have heard the most solemn declarations so continually, that we have ceased to attach any distinct meaning to them; or, if our attention is at any time drawn more closely to them, we soon dismiss the subject on some vague imagination, that what

is said in Scripture had a reference to the particular times when Christ came, without attempting to settle its exact application to us, or whether it has any such application at all,—as if the circumstance that the interpretation requires care and thought, were an excuse for giving no thought nor care whatever to the settling of it.

But, even if we had ever so little concern in the Scripture denunciations against riches and the love of riches, the very awfulness of them might have seemed enough to save them from neglect; just as the flood, and the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, are still dwelt upon by Christians with solemn attention, though we have a promise against the recurrence of the one, and trust we shall never be so deserted by God's grace as to call down upon us the other. And this consideration may lead a man to suspect that the neglect in question does not entirely arise from unconcern, but from a sort of misgiving that the subject of riches is one which cannot be safely or comfortably discussed by the Christian world at this day; that is, which cannot be discussed without placing the claims of God's Law and the pride of life into visible and perplexing opposition.

Let us then see what the letter of Scripture says on the subject. For instance, consider the text. "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have

received your consolation!" The words are sufficiently clear, (it will not be denied,) as spoken of rich persons in our Saviour's day. Let the full force of the word "consolation," be observed. It is used by way of contrast to the comfort which is promised to the Christian in the list of Beatitudes[1]. Comfort, in all the fulness of that word, as including help, guidance, encouragement, and support, is the peculiar promise of the Gospel. The Promised Spirit who has taken Christ's place, was called by Him "the Comforter." There is then something very fearful in the intimation of the text, that those who have riches thereby receive their portion, such as it is, in full, instead of the Heavenly Gift of the Gospel. The same doctrine is implied in our Lord's words in the parable of Dives and Lazarus. "Son, remember thou in thy lifetime receivedst *thy* good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but *now* he is *comforted*, and thou art tormented." At another time He said to His disciples, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! for it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God[2]."

Now it is usual to dismiss such passages with

[1] Matt. v. 4. [2] Luke xvi. 25; xviii. 24, 25.

the remark that they are directed, not against those who have, but against those who trust in riches; as if forsooth they implied no *connexion* between the having and the trusting, no warning *lest* the possession led to the idolatrous reliance on them, no necessity of fear and anxiety in the possessors, lest they should become castaways. And this irrelevant distinction is supposed to find countenance in our Lord's own language on one of the occasions above referred to, in which He first says, "How hardly shall they that *have* riches," then, "How hard is it for them that *trust* in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God;" whereas surely, He only removes His disciples' false impression, that the bare circumstance of possessing wealth was inconsistent with a state of salvation, and as little interprets *having* by *trusting*, as makes *trusting* essential to *having*. He connects the two, without identifying, without explaining away; and the simple question which lies for our determination, is this:—whether, considering that they who had riches when Christ came, were likely in His judgment idolatrously to trust in them, there is, or is not, reason for thinking that this likelihood varies materially in different ages; and, according to the solution of this question, must we determine the application of the woe pronounced in the text to these times. And, at all events, let it be observed,

it is for those who would make out that these passages do *not* apply now, to give their reasons for their opinion; the burden of proof is with them. Till they draw their clear and reasonable distinctions between the first and the nineteenth century, the denunciation hangs over the world that is, as much as over the Pharisees and Sadducees at our Lord's coming.

But, in truth, that our Lord meant to speak of riches as being in some sense a calamity to the Christian, is plain, not only from such texts as the foregoing, but from His praises and recommendation on the other hand of poverty. For instance, "Sell that ye have and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old." "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." "Blessed be ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God." "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours .... but .... call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind." And in like manner, St. James: "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of that kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him[3]?" Now I cite these texts in

[3] Luke xii. 33. Matt. xix. 21. Luke vi. 20; xiv. 12, 13. James ii. 5.

the way of doctrine, not of precept. Whatever be the line of conduct they prescribe to this or that individual (with which I have nothing to do at present,) so far seems clear, that according to the rule of the Gospel, the absence of wealth is, as such, a more blessed and a more Christian state than the possession of it.

The most obvious danger which worldly possessions present to our spiritual welfare is, that they become practically a substitute in our hearts for that One Object to which our supreme devotion is due. They are present; God is unseen. They are means at hand of gaining whatever we may happen to desire; whether God would hear our petitions for these things, whatever they are, is uncertain; or rather, I may say, certain, in the negative. Thus riches minister to the corrupt inclinations of our nature; they promise and are able to be gods to us, and such gods *too* as require no service, but, like dumb idols, exalt the worshipper, impressing him with a notion of his own power and security. And in this consist their chief and most subtle mischief. Religious men are able to repress and bring under sinful desires, the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, gluttony, drunkenness, and the like, love of amusements and frivolous pleasures and display, indulgence in luxuries of whatever kind; but as to wealth, they cannot easily rid themselves of a secret feeling

that it gives them a footing to stand upon, an importance, a superiority; and in consequence they get attached to this world, lose sight of the duty of bearing the Cross, become dull and dim-sighted, and lose their delicacy and precision of touch, being numbed (so to say) in their fingers'-ends, as regards religious interests and prospects. To risk all upon Christ's word seems somehow unnatural to them, extravagant, and evidences a morbid excitement; and death, instead of being a gracious, however awful release, is not a welcome subject of thought. They are content to remain as they are, and do not contemplate a change. They desire and mean to serve God, nay actually do serve Him in their measure; but not with the keen sensibilities, the noble enthusiasm, the grandeur and elevation of soul, the dutifulness and affectionateness towards Christ which becomes a Christian, but as Jews might obey, who had no Image of God given them except this created world, "eating their bread with joy, and drinking their wine with a merry heart," caring that "their garments be always white, and their head lacking no ointment, living joyfully with the wife whom they love all the days of the life of their vanity," and "enjoying the good of their labour[4]." Not,

[4] Eccles. ix. 7—9; v. 18.

of course, that the due use of God's temporal blessings is wrong, but to make them the object of our affections, to allow them to beguile us from the "One Husband" to whom we are espoused, is to mistake the Gospel for Judaism.

This then, if we may venture to say so, was some part of our Saviour's meaning, when He connected together the having with the trusting in riches; and it is especially suitable to consider it upon this day [5], when we commemorate an Apostle and Evangelist, whose history is an example and encouragement for all those who have, and fear lest they should trust. But St. Matthew was exposed to an additional temptation, which I shall proceed to consider; for he was not only in possession, but he was also engaged in the pursuit of wealth. Our Saviour seems to warn us against this further danger in His description of the thorns, in the parable of the Sower, as being "the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches;" and more clearly in the parable of the Great Supper, where the guests excuse themselves, one, as having "bought a piece of ground," another "five yoke of oxen." Still more openly does St. Paul speak in his first Epistle to Timothy; "They that desire to be rich, fall into temptation and a snare,

[5] Preached on St. Matthew's Day.

and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition: For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows[6]."

The danger of *possessing* riches is the carnal security to which they lead; that of "*desiring*" and *pursuing* them, is, that an object of this world is thus set before us as the aim and end of life. It seems to be the will of Christ that His followers should have no aim or end, pursuit or business, merely of this world. Here, again, I speak as before, not in the way of precept, but of doctrine. I am looking at His holy religion as at a distance, and determining what is its general character and spirit, not what may happen to be the duty of this or that individual who has embraced it. It is His will that all we do should be done, not unto men, or to the world, or to self, but to His glory; and the more we are enabled to do this simply, the more favoured we are. Whenever we act with reference to an object of this world, even though it be ever so pure, we are exposed to the temptation, (not irresistible, God forbid!) still to the temptation of setting our hearts upon obtaining

[6] Matt. xiii. 22. Luke xiv. 18, 19. 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

it. And therefore, we call all such objects *excitements*, as stimulating us incongruously, casting us out of the serenity and stability of heavenly faith, attracting us aside by their proximity from our harmonious round of duties, and making our thoughts converge to something short of that which is infinitely High and eternal. Such excitements are of perpetual occurrence, and the mere undergoing them, so far from involving guilt in the act itself or its results, is the great business of life and the discipline of our hearts. It is often a sin to withdraw from them, as has been the case of some perhaps who have gone into Monasteries to serve God more entirely. On the other hand, it is the very duty of the Spiritual Ruler to labour for the flock committed to him, to suffer and to dare; St. Paul was encompassed with excitements hence arising, and his writings show the agitating effect of them on his mind. He was like David, a man of war and blood; and that, for our sakes. Still it holds good that the essential spirit of the Gospel is "quietness and confidence;" that the possession of these is the highest gift, and to gain them perfectly our main aim. Consequently, however much a duty it is to undergo excitements when they are sent upon us, it is plainly unchristian, a manifest foolishness and sin, to seek out any such, whether secular or

religious. Hence gaming is so great an offence; as being a presumptuous creation on our part of a serious, if not an overpowering temptation to fix the heart upon an object of this world. Hence, the mischief of many amusements of (what is called) the fashion of the day; which are devised for the very purpose of taking up the thoughts, and making time pass easy. Quite contrary is the Christian temper, which is in its perfect and peculiar enjoyment when engaged in that ordinary, unvaried course of duties which God assigns, and which the world calls dull and tiresome. To get up day after day to the same employments, and to feel happy in them, is the great lesson of the Gospel; and, when it has been learned by self discipline, evidences a heart weaned from the love of this world. True it is, that illness of body, as well as restlessness of mind, may occasionally render such a life a burden; it is true also, that indolence, self-indulgence, timidity, and other similar bad habits, may indulge in it by preference, as a pretext for neglecting more active duties. Men of energetic minds and talents for action are called to a life of trouble; they are the compensations and antagonists of the world's evils: still let them never forget their place; they are men of war, and we war that we may obtain peace. They are but men of war, honoured

indeed by God's choice, and in spite of all momentary excitements, resting in the depth of their hearts upon the One True Vision of Christian faith; still after all they are but soldiers in the open field, not builders of the Temple, nor inhabitants of those "amiable" and specially blessed "Tabernacles" where the worshipper lives in praise and intercession, and is militant amid the unostentatious duties of ordinary life. "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary has chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her[7]." Such is our Lord's judgment, showing that our true happiness consists in being at leisure to serve God without excitements. For this gift we especially pray in one of our Collects: "Grant, O Lord, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Thy governance, that Thy Church may joyfully serve Thee in all godly quietness[8]." Persecution, civil changes, and the like, break in upon the Church's calm. The greatest privilege of a Christian is to have nothing to do with worldly politics,—to be governed and to submit obediently; and, though here again, selfishness may creep in, and lead a man to neglect public

[7] Luke x. 41, 42. [8] Vid. 1 Tim. ii. 2.

concerns in which he is called to take his share, yet, after all, such participation must be regarded as a duty, scarcely as a privilege, as the fulfilment of trusts committed to him for the good of others, not as the enjoyment of rights, (as men talk in these days of delusion,) not as if political power were in itself a good.

To return to the subject immediately before us, I say then, that it is a part of Christian caution to see that our engagements do not become pursuits. Engagements are our portion, but pursuits are for the most part of our own choosing. We may be engaged in worldly business, without pursuing worldly objects; "not slothful in business," yet "serving the Lord." In this then consists the danger of the pursuit of gain, as by means of trade and the like. It is the most common and widely extended of all excitements. It is one in which every one almost may indulge, nay, and will be praised by the world for indulging. And it lasts through life; in that differing from the amusements and pleasures of the world, which are short-lived, and succeed one after another. Dissipation of mind, which these amusements create, is itself indeed miserable enough; but far worse than this dissipation is the concentration of mind upon some worldly object, which admits of being constantly pursued,—and such is the pursuit of gain. Nor is it a slight

aggravation of the evil, that anxiety is almost sure to attend it. A life of money-getting is a life of care; from the first there is a fearful anticipation of loss in various ways to depress and unsettle the mind, nay to haunt it, till a man finds he can think about nothing else, and is unable to give his mind to religion from the constant whirl of business in which he is involved. It is well this should be understood. You may hear men talk as if the pursuit of wealth was the business of life. They will argue that by the law of nature a man is bound to gain a livelihood for his family, and that he finds a reward in doing so, an innocent and honourable satisfaction, as he adds one sum to another, and counts up his gains. And perhaps they go on to argue, that it is the very duty of man since Adam's fall, "in the sweat of his face," by effort and anxiety, "to eat bread." How strange it is that they do not remember Christ's gracious promise, repealing that original curse, and obviating the necessity of any real pursuit after "the meat that perisheth!" In order that we might be delivered from the bondage of corruption, He has expressly told us that the necessaries of life shall never fail his faithful follower, any more than the meal and oil the widow-woman of Sarepta; that, while he is bound to labour for his family, he need not be engrossed

by his toil,—that while he is busy, his heart may be at leisure for his Lord. "Be not anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewithal shall be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Here is revealed to us at once our privilege and our duty, the Christian portion of having engagements of this world without pursuing objects. And in accordance with our divine Teacher are the words of the Apostle, introductory of a passage already cited. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content[9]." There is no excuse then for that absorbing pursuit of wealth, which many men indulge in as if a virtue, and expatiate upon as if a science. "After all these things do the Gentiles seek!" Consider how different is the rule of life left us by the Apostles. "I speak this for your own profit," says St. Paul, "that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." "This I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that

[9] Matt. vi. 1 Tim. vi. 7, 8.

both they that have wives be as though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy, as though they possessed not, and they that use this world, as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away." "Be anxious for nothing; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." And St. Peter, "Casting all your anxiety upon Him, for He careth for you[1]."

I have now given the main reason, why the pursuit of gain, whether in a large or small way, is prejudicial to our spiritual interests, that it fixes the mind upon an object of this world; yet others remain behind. Money is a sort of creation, and gives the acquirer, even more than the possessor, an imagination of his own power; and tends to make him idolize self. Again, what we have hardly won, we are unwilling to part with; so that a man who has himself made his wealth, will commonly be penurious, or at least will not part with it except in exchange for what will reflect credit upon himself, or increase his importance. Even when his conduct is most disinterested and amiable, (as in spending for the comfort of those

[1] 1 Cor. vii. 29—31. 35. Phil. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 7.

who depend on him,) still this indulgence of self, of pride and worldliness, insinuates itself. Very unlikely therefore is it that he should be liberal towards God; for religious offerings are an expenditure without sensible return, and that upon objects for which the very pursuit of wealth has indisposed his mind. Moreover, if it may be added, there is a considerable tendency in occupations connected with gain to make a man unfair in his dealings, that is, in a subtle way. There are so many conventional deceits and prevarications in the details of the world's business, so much intricacy in the management of accounts, so many perplexed questions about justice and equity, so many plausible subterfuges and fictions of law, so much confusion between the distinct yet approximating outlines of honesty and civil enactment, that it requires a very straight-forward mind to keep firm hold of strict conscientiousness, honour, and truth, and to look at matters in which he is engaged, as he would have looked on them, supposing he now came upon them all at once as a stranger.

And if such be the effect of the pursuit of gain on an individual, doubtless it will be the same on a nation; and if the peril be so great in the one case, why should it be less in the other? Rather considering that the tendencies of things are sure

to be brought out, where time and numbers allow them fair course, is it not certain that any multitude, any society of men, whose object is gain, will on the whole be actuated by those feelings, and moulded into that character, which has been above described? With this thought before us, it is a very fearful consideration that we belong to a nation which in good measure subsists by making money. I will not pursue it; nor inquire whether the especial political evils of the day have not their root in that principle, which St. Paul calls the root of all evil, the love of money. Only let us consider the fact, that we *are* money-making people, with our Saviour's declarations before us against wealth, and trust in wealth; and we shall have abundant matter for serious thought.

Lastly, with this dreary view before us of our condition and prospects as a nation, the pattern of St. Matthew is our consolation; for it suggests that we, Christ's ministers, may use great freedom of speech, and state unreservedly the peril of wealth and gain, without aught of harshness or uncharitableness towards individuals who are exposed to it. For these persons may be brethren of the Evangelist, who left all for Christ's sake. Nay such there have been (blessed be God!) in every age; and in proportion to the strength of the temptation

which surrounds them, is their blessedness and their praise, if they are enabled amid the "wares of the seas" and the "great wisdom of their traffick" to hear Christ's voice, to take up their Cross, and follow Him.

SERMON XXIV.

CHRISTIAN MANHOOD.

1 Cor. xiii. 11.

"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

When our Lord was going to leave the world and return to His Father, He called His disciples *orphans;* children, as it were, whom He had been rearing, who were still unable to direct themselves, and who were soon to lose their Protector; but He said, "I will not leave you comfortless orphans, I will come to you[1];" meaning to say, He would come again to them in the power of His Holy Spirit, who should be their present all-sufficient Guide, though He Himself was away. And we know, from the sacred history, that when the Holy Spirit came, they ceased to be the defenceless children they had been before. He

[1] John xiv. 18.

breathed into them a divine life, and gifted them with spiritual manhood, or *perfection*, as it is called in Scripture. From that time forth, they put away childish things: they spake, they understood, they thought, as those who had been taught to govern themselves; and who, having "an unction from the Holy One, knew all things."

That such a change was wrought in the Apostles, according to Christ's promise, is evident from comparing their conduct *before* the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended on them, and *after*. I need not enlarge on their wonderful firmness and zeal in their Master's cause afterwards. On the other hand it is plain from the Gospels, that before the Holy Ghost came down, that is, while Christ was still with them, they were as helpless and ignorant as children; had no clear notion what they ought to seek after, and how, and were carried astray by their accidental feelings and their long-cherished prejudices.—What was it but to act the child, to ask how many times a fellow-Christian should offend against us, and we forgive him, as St. Peter did? or to ask to see the Father, with St. Philip? or to propose to build tabernacles on the mount, as if they were not to return to the troubles of the world? or to dispute who should be the greatest[2]?

[2] Matt. xvii. 4; xviii. 21; xx. 20. John xiv. 8.

or to look for Christ's restoring at that time the temporal kingdom to Israel[3]? Natural as such views were in the case of half-instructed Jews, they were evidently unworthy those whom Christ had made His, that He might "present them perfect" before the throne of God.

Yet the first disciples of Christ at least put off their vanities once for all, when the Spirit came upon them; but as to ourselves, the Spirit has long since been poured upon us, even from our earliest years; yet it is a serious question, whether multitudes of us, even of those among us who make a profession of religion, are even so far advanced in a knowledge of the Truth as the Apostles were before the day of Pentecost. It may be a profitable employment to-day to consider this question, as suggested by the text,—to inquire how far we have proceeded in putting off such childish things as are inconsistent with a manly honest profession of the Gospel.

Now, observe, I am not inquiring whether we are plainly living in sin, in wilful disobedience; nor even whether we are yielding through thoughtlessness to sinful practices and habits. The condition of those who act against their conscience, or who act without conscience, that is, lightly and

[3] Acts i. 6.

carelessly, is far indeed from bearing any resemblance to that of the Apostles in the years of their early discipleship. I am supposing you, my brethren, to be on the whole followers of Christ, to profess to obey Him; and I address you as those who seem to themselves to have a fair hope of salvation. I am directing your attention, not to your sins, not to those faults and failings which you know to be such, and are trying to conquer, as being confessedly evil in themselves, but to such of your views, wishes, and tastes, as resemble those which the Apostles cherished, true believers as they were, before they attained their manhood in the Gospel: and I ask, how far you have dismissed these from your minds as vain and trifling; that is, how far you have made what St. Paul in the text seems to consider the first step in the true spiritual course of a Christian, on whom the Holy Ghost has descended.

1. For example, Let us consider our love of the pleasures of life. I am willing to allow there is an innocent love of the world, innocent in itself. God made the world, and has sanctioned the general form of human society, and has given us abundant pleasures in it; I do not say *lasting* pleasures, but still, while they last, really pleasures. It is natural that the young should look with hope to the prospect before them. They cannot help

forming schemes what they will do when they come into active life, or what they should wish to be had they their choice. They indulge themselves in fancyings about the future, which they know at the time cannot come true. At other times they confine themselves to what is possible; and then their hearts burn, while they dream of quiet happiness, domestic comfort, independence. Or, with bolder views, they push forward their fortunes into public life, and indulge ambitious hopes. They fancy themselves rising in the world, distinguished, courted, admired; securing influence over others, and rewarded with high station. James and John had such a dream when they besought Christ that they might sit at His side in the most honourable places in His kingdom.

Now such dreams can hardly be called sinful in themselves, and without reference to the particular case; for the gifts of wealth, power, and influence, and much more of domestic comfort, come from God, and may be religiously improved. But, though not directly censurable, they are *childish;* childish either in themselves, or at least when cherished and indulged; childish in a Christian, who has infinitely higher views to engross his mind; and, as being childish, excusable only in the young. They *are* an offence when retained

as life goes on; but in the young we may regard them after the pattern of our Saviour's judgment upon the young man who was rich and noble. He is said to have "loved him;" pitying (that is) and not harshly denouncing the anticipations which he had formed of happiness from wealth and power, yet withal not concealing from him the sacrifice of all these which he must make, "if he would be perfect," that is, a man, and not a mere child in the Gospel.

2. But there are other childish views and habits besides, which must be put off, while we take on ourselves the full profession of a Christian; and these, not so free from intrinsic guilt as those which have been already noticed;—such as the love of display, greediness of the world's praise, and the love of the comforts and luxuries of life. These, though wrong tempers of mind, still I do not now call by their hardest names, because I would lead persons, if I could, rather to turn away from them as unworthy a Christian, with a sort of contempt, outgrowing them as they grow in grace, and laying them aside as a matter of course, while they are gradually learning to "set their affections on things above, not on things on the earth."

Children have evil tempers and idle ways which we do not deign to speak seriously of. Not that

we, in any degree, approve them or endure them on their own account; nay, we punish some of them; but we bear them *in* children, and look for their disappearing as the mind becomes more mature. And so in religious matters there are many habits and views, which we bear with in the unformed Christian, but which we account disgraceful and contemptible should they survive that time when a man's character may be supposed to be settled. Love of display is one of these; whether we are vain of our abilities, or our acquirements, or our wealth, or our personal appearance; whether we discover our weakness in talking much, or love of managing, or again in love of dress. Vanity, indeed, and conceit are always disagreeable, for the reason that they interfere with the comfort of other persons, and vex them; but I am here observing, that they are *in themselves* odious, when discerned in those who enjoy the full privileges of the Church, and are by profession men in Christ Jesus, odious from their inconsistency with Christian faith and earnestness.

And so with respect to the love of worldly comforts and luxuries, (which, unhappily, often grows upon us rather than disappears from our character,) whether or not it be natural in youth, at least it is (if I may so say) *shocking* in those who profess to be "perfect," if we would estimate

things aright; and this from its great incongruity with the spirit of the Gospel. Is it not something beyond measure strange and monstrous, (if we could train our hearts to possess a right judgment in all things,) to profess that our treasure is not here, but in heaven with Him who is ascended thither, and to own that we have a cross to bear after Him, who first suffered before He triumphed; and yet to set ourselves *deliberately* to study our own comfort as some great and sufficient end, to go much out of our way to promote it, to sacrifice any thing considerable to guard it, and to be downcast at the prospect of the loss of it? Is it possible for a true son of the Church militant, while "the ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents," and "the servants of his Lord are encamped in the open field," to "eat and drink" securely, to wrap himself in the furniture of wealth, to feed his eyes with "the pride of life," and complete for himself the measure of this world's elegances?

Again, all timidity, irresolution, fear of ridicule, weakness of purpose, such as the Apostles showed when they deserted Christ, and Peter especially when he denied Him, are to be numbered among the tempers of mind which are childish as well as sinful; which we must learn to despise,—to be ashamed at ourselves if we are influenced by them,

and, instead of thinking the conquest of them a great thing, to account it as one of the very first steps towards being but an ordinary true believer; just as the Apostles, in spite of their former discipleship, only commenced (surely) their Christian course at the day of Pentecost, and then took to themselves a good measure of faith, boldness, zeal, and self-mastery, not as some great proficiency and as a boast, but as the very condition of their being Christians at all, as the elements of spiritual life, as a mere outfitting, and a small attainment indeed in that extended course of sanctification through which the Blessed Spirit is willing to lead every Christian.

Now in this last remark I have given a chief reason for dwelling on the subject before us. It is very common for Christians to make much of what are but petty services; first to place the very substance of religious obedience in a few meagre observances, or particular moral precepts which are easily complied with, and which they think fit to call giving up the world; and then to make a great vaunting, about their having done what, in truth, every one who is not a mere child in Christ ought to be able to do, to congratulate themselves upon their success, ostentatiously to return thanks for it, to condemn others who do not happen to move exactly along the very same

line of minute practices in detail which they have adopted, and in consequence to forget that, after all, by such poor obedience, right though it be, still they have not approached even to a distant view of that point in their Christian course, at which they may consider themselves, in St. Paul's words, to have "attained" a sure hope of salvation; just as little children, when they first have strength to move their limbs, triumph in every exertion of their newly acquired power, as in some great victory. To put off idle hopes of earthly good, to be sick of flattery and the world's praise, to see the emptiness of temporal greatness, and to be watchful against self-indulgence; these are but the beginnings of religion, these are but the preparation of heart, which religious earnestness implies; without a good share of them, how can a Christian move a step? How could Abraham, when called of God, have even set out from his native place, unless he had left off to think much of this world, and cared not for its ridicule? Surely these attainments are but our first manly robe, showing that childhood is gone; and, if we feel the love and fear of the world still active within our hearts, deeply must we be humbled, yes, and alarmed; and humbled even though but the traces remain of former weaknesses. But even if otherwise, what thank have we? See

what the Apostles were, by way of contrast, and then you will see what is the true life of the Spirit, the substance and full fruit of holiness. To love our brethren with a resolution which no obstacles can overcome, so as almost to consent to an anathema on ourselves, if so be we may save those who hate us,—to labour in God's cause against hope, and in the midst of sufferings,—to read the events of life, as they occur, by the interpretation which Scripture gives them, and that, not as if the language were strange to us, but to do it promptly,—to perform all our relative daily duties most watchfully,—to check every evil thought, and bring the whole mind into captivity to the law of Christ,—to be patient, cheerful, forgiving, meek, honest, and true,—to persevere in this good work till death; making fresh and fresh advances towards perfection,—and after all, even to the end, to confess ourselves unprofitable servants, nay, to feel ourselves corrupt and sinful creatures, who (with all our proficiency) would still be lost unless God bestow on us His mercy in Christ;—these are some of the difficult realities of religious obedience, which we must pursue, and which the Apostles in high measure attained, and which, we may well bless God's holy name, if He enables us to make our own.

Let us then take it for granted, as a truth which

cannot be gainsaid, that to break with the world, and make religion our first concern, is, only to cease to be children; and, again, that in consequence, those Christians who have come to mature years, and yet do not even so much as this, are "in the presence of the Angels of God," an odious and unnatural spectacle, a mockery of Christianity. I do not say what such men are in God's sight, and what are their prospects for the next world; for that is a fearful thought,—and we ought to be influenced by motives far higher than that mere slavish dread of future punishment to which such a consideration would lead us.

But here some one may ask, whether I am not speaking severely in urging so many sacrifices at the beginning of true Christian obedience. In conclusion, then, I observe, in the first place, that I have not said a word against the moderate and thankful enjoyment of this life's goods, *when* they actually come in our way; but against the wishing earnestly for them, seeking them, and preferring them to God's righteousness, which is commonly done. Further, I am not excluding from the company of Christians all who cannot at once make up their minds thus vigorously to reject the world, when its goods are dangerous, inexpedient, or unsuitable; but excluding them from the company of mature, manly Christians. Doubtless our

Lord deals gently with us. He has put His two Sacraments apart from each other. Baptism, first admits us to His favour; His Holy Supper brings us among His perfect ones. He has put from fourteen to twenty years between them, in the ordinary course of things, that we may have time to count the cost, and make our decision calmly. Only there must be no standing still, there cannot be; time goes slowly, yet surely from birth to the age of manhood, in like manner, our minds, though slowly formed to love Christ, must still be forming. It is when men are mature in years, and yet are "children in understanding," then they are intolerable, because they have exceeded their season, and are out of place. Then it is that ambitious thoughts, trifling pursuits and amusements, passionate wishes and keen hopes, and the love of display, are directly sinful because they are by that time deliberate sins. While they were children, "they spake as children, understood, thought as children;" but when they became men, "it was high time to awake out of sleep," and "put away childish things." And if they have continued children instead of "having their senses exercised to discriminate between the excellent and the base," alas, what deep repentance must be theirs, before they can know what true peace is!—what self-reproach and sharp self-discipline,

before their eyes can be opened to see effectually those truths which are "spiritually discerned!"

So much on the case of those who neglect to grow betimes into the hope of their calling. As to the young themselves, it is plain that nothing I have said can give encouragement to them to acquiesce in their present incomplete devotion of themselves to God, because it will be as much as they can do, even with their best efforts, to make their growth of wisdom and of stature keep pace with each other. And if there be any one who, as thinking the enjoyments of youth must soon be relinquished, deliberately resolves to make the most of them before the duties of manhood come upon him, such an one, in doing so, is rendering it impossible for him to give them up, when he is called to do so. As for those who allow themselves in what, even in youth, is clearly sinful,—the deliberate neglect of prayer, profaneness, riotous living, or other immorality,—the case of such persons has not even entered into my mind, when I spoke of youthful thoughtlessness. They, of course, have no "inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

But if there be those among us, and such there well may be, who, like the young ruler, "worshipping Christ," and "loved" by Him, and obeying His commandments from their youth

up, yet cannot but be "sorrowful" at the thought of giving up their pleasant visions, their childish idolatries, and their bright hopes of earthly happiness, such I bid be of good cheer, and take courage. What is it your Saviour requires of you, more than will also be exacted from you by that hard and evil master, who desires your ruin? Christ bids you give up the world; but will not, at any rate, the world soon give up you? Can you keep it, by being its slave? Will not he, whose creature of temptation it is, the prince of the world, take it from you, whatever he at present promises? What does your Lord require of you, but to look at all things as they really are, to account them merely as His instruments, and to believe that good is good because He wills it, that He can bless as easily by hard stone as by bread, in the desert as in the fruitful field, if we have faith in Him who gives us the true bread from heaven? Daniel and his friends were princes of the royal house of David; they were "children well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom, cunning in knowledge, and understanding science [4];" yet they had faith to refuse even the literal meat and drink given them, because it was an idol's sacrifice, and God sustained them without

[4] Dan. i. 4.

it. For ten days of trial they lived on pulse and water; yet "at the end," says the sacred record, "their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat." Doubt not, then, His power to bring you through any difficulties, who gives you the command to encounter them. He has showed you the way; He gave up the home of His mother Mary to "be about His Father's business," and now He but bids you take up after Him the cross which He bore for you, and "fill up what is wanting of His afflictions in your flesh." Be not afraid,—it is but a pang now and then, and a struggle; a covenant with your eyes, and a fasting in the wilderness, some calm habitual watchfulness, and the hearty effort to obey, and all will be well. Be not afraid. He is most gracious, and will bring you on by little and little. He does not show you whither He is leading you; you might be frightened did you see the whole prospect at once. Sufficient for the day is its own evil. Follow His plan; look not on anxiously; look down at your present footing "lest it be turned out of the way," but speculate not about the future: I can well believe that you have hopes now, which you cannot give up, and even which support you in your present course. Be it so; whether they will be

fulfilled, or not, is in His hand. He may be pleased to grant the desires of your heart; if so, thank Him for His mercy; only be sure, that all will be for your highest good, and "as thy days, so shall thy strength be. There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in His excellency on the sky. The Eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms[5]." He knows no variableness, neither shadow of turning; and when we outgrow our childhood, we but approach, however feebly, to His likeness, who has no youth nor age, who has no passions, no hopes, nor fears, but who loves truth, purity, and mercy, and who is supremely blessed, because He is supremely holy.

Lastly, while we thus think of Him, let us not forget to be up and doing. Let us beware of indulging a mere barren faith and love, which dreams instead of working, and is fastidious when it should be hardy. This is only spiritual childhood in another form;—for the Holy Ghost is the Author of active good works, and leads us to the observance of all lowly deeds of ordinary obedience as the most pleasing sacrifice to God.

[5] Deut. xxxiii. 25—27.

SERMON XXV.

WATCHING.

MARK xiii. 33.

"Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is."

OUR Saviour gave this warning when He was leaving this world,—leaving it, that is, as far as His visible presence is concerned. He looked forward to the many hundred years which were to pass before He came again. He knew His own purpose and His Father's purpose gradually to leave the world to itself, gradually to withdraw from it the tokens of His gracious presence. He contemplated, as contemplating all things, the neglect of Him which would spread even among His professed followers; the daring disobedience, and the loud words, which would be ventured against Him and His Father by many whom He had regenerated: and the coldness, cowardice, and tolerance of error which would be displayed by

others, who did not go so far as to speak or to act against Him. He foresaw the state of the world and the Church, as we see it this day, when His prolonged absence has made it practically thought, that He never will come back in visible presence; and in the text, He mercifully whispers into our ears, not to trust in what we see, not to share in that general unbelief, not to be carried away by the world, but to "take heed, watch[1], pray," and look out for His coming.

Surely this gracious warning should be ever in our thoughts, being so precise, so solemn, so earnest. He foretold His first coming, yet He took His Church by surprise when He came; much more will He come suddenly the second time, and overtake men, now that He has not measured out the interval before it, as then He did, but left our watchfulness to the keeping of faith and love.

Let us then consider this most serious question, which concerns every one of us so nearly; what it is to *watch* for Christ. He says, "*Watch* ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh; at even, or at midnight, or at the cock crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say

[1] ἀγρυπνεῖτε.

unto you, I say unto all, Watch[2]." And again, "If the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have *watched*, and not have suffered his house to be broken through[3]." A like warning is given elsewhere both by our Lord and by His Apostles. For instance; we have the parable of the ten virgins, five of whom were wise and five foolish; on whom the bridegroom, after tarrying, came suddenly, and five were found without oil. On which our Lord says, "*Watch* therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh[4]." Again He says, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares; for as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. *Watch* ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man[5]." In like manner He upbraided Peter thus: "Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou *watch* one hour[6]?"

In like manner St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans. "Now it is high time to awake out of

[2] Mark xii. 35—37. γρηγορεῖτε. [3] Luke xii. 39.
[4] Matt. xxv. 13. [5] Luke xxi. 36. [6] Mark xiv. 37.

sleep. . . . . The night is far spent, the day is at hand[7]." Again, "*Watch* ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong[8]." "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might; put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil . . . . that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand[9]." "Let us not sleep as do others, but let us *watch* and be sober[1]." In like manner St. Peter, "The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and *watch* unto prayer." "Be sober, be *vigilant*, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour[2]." And St. John, "Behold I come as a thief; blessed is he that *watcheth* and keepeth his garments[3]."

Now I consider this word *watching*, first used by our Lord, then by the favoured Disciple, then by the two great Apostles, Peter and Paul, is a remarkable word; remarkable because the idea is not so obvious as might appear at first sight, and next because they all inculcate it. We are not simply to believe, but to watch; not simply to love, but to watch; not simply to obey, but to watch; to watch for what? for that great event,

[7] Rom. xiii. 11, 12.
[8] 1 Cor. xvi. 13.
[9] Eph. vi. 10—13.
[1] 1 Thess. v. 6.
[2] 1 Pet. iv. 7. *νήψατε*, v. 8.
[3] Rev. xvi. 15.

Christ's coming. Whether then we consider what is the obvious meaning of the word, or the Object towards which it directs us, we seem to see a special duty enjoined on us, such as does not naturally come into our minds. Most of us have a general idea what is meant by believing, fearing, loving, and obeying; but perhaps we do not contemplate or apprehend what is meant by watching.

And I conceive it is one of the main points, which, in a practical way, will be found to separate the true and perfect servants of God from the multitude called Christians; from those who are, I do not say false and reprobate, but who are such that we cannot speak much about them, nor can form any notion what will become of them. And in saying this, do not understand me as saying, which I do not, that we can tell for certain who are the perfect, and who the double-minded or incomplete Christians; or that those who discourse and insist upon these subjects are necessarily on the right side of the line. I am but speaking of two *characters*, the true and consistent character, and the inconsistent; and these I say will be found in no slight degree discriminated and distinguished by this one mark,—true Christians, whoever they are, watch, and inconsistent Christians do not. Now what is watching?

I conceive it may be explained as follows:—Do you know the feeling in matters of this life, of expecting a friend, expecting him to come, and he delays? do you know what it is to be in unpleasant company, and to wish for the time to pass away, and the hour strike when you may be at liberty? do you know what it is to be in anxiety lest something should happen which may happen or may not, or to be in suspense about some important event, which makes your heart beat when you are reminded of it, and of which you think the first thing in the morning? do you know what it is to have a friend in a distant country, to expect news of him, and to wonder from day to day what he is now doing, and whether he is well? do you know what it is so to live upon a person who is present with you, that your eyes follow his, that you read his soul, that you see all its changes in his countenance, that you anticipate his wishes, that you smile in his smile, and are sad in his sadness, and are downcast when he is vexed, and rejoice in his successes? To watch for Christ is a feeling such as all these; as far as feelings of this world are fit to shadow out those of another.

He watches for Christ who has a sensitive, eager, apprehensive mind; who is awake, alive, quick-sighted, zealous in seeking and honouring

Him; who looks out for Him in all that happens, and who would not be surprised, who would not be over-agitated, or overwhelmed, if he found that He was coming at once?

And he watches *with* Christ, who, while he looks on to the future, looks back on the past, and does not so contemplate what his Saviour has purchased for him, as to forget what He has suffered for him. He watches with Christ, who ever commemorates and renews in his own person Christ's Cross and agony, and gladly takes up that mantle of affliction which Christ wore here, and left behind Him when He ascended. And hence in the Epistles, often as the inspired writers show their desire for His second coming, as often do they show their memory of His first, and never lose sight of His Crucifixion in His Resurrection. Thus if St. Paul reminds the Romans that they "wait for the redemption of the body" at the Last Day, he also says, "If so be that we *suffer with Him*, that we may be also glorified together." If he speaks to the Corinthians of "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," he also speaks of "always bearing about in the body the *dying* of the Lord Jesus, *that* the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." If to the Philippians of "the power of His resurrection," he adds at once, "*and the fellowship of His sufferings*, being

made conformable unto His death." If he consoles the Colossians with the hope "when Christ shall appear," of their "appearing with Him in glory," he has already declared that he "*fills up that which remains of the afflictions of Christ* in his flesh for His body's sake, which is the Church [4]." Thus the thought of what Christ is, must not obliterate from the mind the thought of what He was; and faith is always sorrowing with Him while it rejoices. And the same union of opposite thoughts is impressed on us in Holy Communion, in which we see Christ's death and resurrection together, at one and the same time; we commemorate the one, we rejoice in the other; we make an offering, and we gain a blessing.

This then is to watch; to be detached from what is present, and to live in what is unseen; to live in the thought of Christ as He came once, and as He will come again; to desire His second coming, from our affectionate and grateful remembrance of His first. And this it is, which we shall find that men in general are without. They are indeed without faith and love also; but at least they profess to have these graces, nor is it easy to convince them that they have not. For they consider they have faith, if

[4] Rom. viii. 17—23. 1 Cor. i. 7. 2 Cor. iv. 10. Phil. iii. 10. Col. iii. 4; i. 24.

they do but own that the Bible came from God, or that they trust wholly in Christ for salvation; and they consider they have love, if they obey some of the most obvious of God's commandments. Love and faith they think they have; but surely they do not even fancy that they watch. What is meant by watching, and how it is a duty, they have no definite idea; and thus it accidentally happens that watching is a suitable test of a Christian, in that it is that particular property of faith and love, which, essential as it is, men of this world do not even profess; that particular property, which is the life or energy of faith and love, the way in which faith and love, if genuine, show themselves.

It is easy to exemplify what I mean from the experience which we all have of life. Many men indeed are open revilers of religion, or at least openly disobey its laws; but let us consider those who are of a more sober and conscientious cast of mind. They have a number of good qualities, and are in a certain sense and up to a certain point religious; but they do not watch. Their notion of religion is briefly this; loving God indeed, but loving this world too; not only doing their *duty*, but finding their chief and highest *good*, in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them, resting in it, taking it as their portion.

They serve God, and they seek Him; but they look on the present world as if it were the eternal, not a mere temporary scene of their duties and privileges, and never contemplate the prospect of being separated from it. It is not that they forget God, or do not live by principle, or forget that the goods of this world are His gift, but they love them for their own sake more than for the sake of the Giver, and reckon on their remaining, as if they had the permanence which their duties and religious privileges have. They do not understand that they are called to be strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, and that their worldly lot and worldly goods are a sort of accident of their existence, and that they really have no property, though human law guarantees property to them. Accordingly, they set their heart upon their goods, be they great or little, not without a sense of religion the while, but idolatrously. *This* is their fault,—an identifying God with this world, and therefore an idolatry towards this world; and so they are rid of the trouble of looking out for their God, for they think they have found Him in the goods of this world. While, then, they are really praiseworthy in many parts of their conduct, benevolent, charitable, kind, neighbourly, and useful in their generation, nay, constant perhaps in the ordinary religious duties which custom

has established, and while they display much right and amiable feeling, and much correctness in opinion, and are even in the way to improve in character and conduct as time goes on, correct much that is amiss, gain greater command over themselves, mature in judgment, and are much looked up to in consequence; yet still it is plain that they love this world, would be loath to leave it, and wish to have more of its good things. They like wealth, and distinction, and credit, and influence. They may improve in conduct, but not in aims; they advance, but they do not mount; they are moving on a low level, and were they to move on for centuries, would never rise above the atmosphere of this world. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved[5]." This is the temper of mind which they have not; and when we reflect how rarely it *is* found among professing Christians, we shall see why our Lord is so urgent in enforcing it;—as if He said, "I am not warning you, My followers, against open apostasy; that will not be; but I foresee that very few will keep awake and watch while I am away. Blessed are the servants who do so; few will open

[5] Hab. ii. 1.

to Me *immediately*, when I knock. They will have something to do first; they will have to get ready. They will have to recover from the surprise and confusion which overtake them on the first news of My coming, and will need time to collect themselves, and summon about them their better thoughts and affections. They feel themselves very well off as they are; and wish to serve God as they are. They are satisfied to remain on earth; they do not wish to move; they do not wish to change."

Without denying, then, to these persons the praise of many religious habits and practices, I would say that they want the tender and sensitive heart which hangs on the thought of Christ, and lives in His love. The breath of the world has a peculiar power in what may be called rusting the soul. The mirror within them, instead of reflecting back the Son of God their Saviour, has become dim and discoloured; and hence, though (to use a common expression) they have a good deal of good *in* them, it is only *in* them, it is not through them, around them, and upon them. An evil crust is *on* them: they think with the world; they are full of the world's notions and modes of speaking; they appeal to the world, and have a sort of reverence for what the world will say. There is a want of naturalness, simplicity, and childlike

teachableness in them. It is difficult to touch them, or (what may be called) get at them, and to persuade them to a straightforward course in religion. They start off when you least expect it: they have reservations, make distinctions, take exceptions, indulge in refinements, in questions where there are really but two sides, a right and a wrong. Their religious feelings do not flow forth easily, at times when they ought to flow; either they are difficult, and can say nothing, or else they are affected and strained in their mode of conversing. And as a rust preys upon metal and eats into it, so does this worldly spirit penetrate more and more deeply into the soul which once admits it. And this is one great end, as it would appear, of afflictions, viz. to rub away and clear off these outward defilements, and to keep the soul in a measure of its baptismal purity and brightness.

Now, it cannot surely be doubted that multitudes in the Church are such as I have been describing, and that they would not, could not, at once welcome our Lord on His coming. We cannot, indeed, apply what has been said to this or that individual; but on the whole, viewing the multitude, one cannot be mistaken; there may be exceptions; but after all conceivable deductions, a large body must remain thus double-minded, thus attempting to unite things incompatible.

This we might be sure of, though Christ had said nothing on the subject; but it is a most affecting and solemn thought, that He has actually called our attention to this very danger, the danger of a worldly religiousness, for so it may be called, though it *is* religiousness; this mixture of religion and unbelief, which serves God indeed, but loves the fashions, the distinctions, the pleasures, the comforts of this life,—which feels a satisfaction in being prosperous in circumstances, likes pomps and vanities, is particular about food, raiment, house, furniture, and domestic matters, courts great people, and aims at having a position in society. He warns His disciples of the danger of having their minds drawn off from the thought of Him, by whatever cause; He warns them against *all* excitements, *all* allurements of this world; He solemnly warns them that the world will not be prepared for His coming, and tenderly intreats of them not to take their portion with the world. He warns them by the instance of the rich man whose soul was required, of the servant who ate and drank, and of the foolish virgins. When He comes, they will one and all want time; their head will be confused, their eyes will swim, their tongue falter, their limbs totter, as men who are suddenly awakened. They will not all at once collect their senses and faculties. O fearful

thought! the bridal train is sweeping by,—Angels are there,—the just made perfect are there,—little children, and holy teachers, and white-robed saints, and martyrs washed in blood; the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. She has already attired herself: while we have been sleeping, she has been robing; she has been adding jewel to jewel, and grace to grace; she has been gathering in her chosen ones, one by one, and has been exercising them in holiness, and purifying them for her Lord; and now her marriage hour is come. The holy Jerusalem is descending, and a loud voice proclaims, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him!" but we, alas! are but dazzled with the blaze of light, and neither welcome the sound, nor obey it,—and all for what? what shall we have gained then? what will this world have then done for us? wretched, deceiving world! which will then be burned up, unable not only to profit us, but to save itself. Miserable hour, indeed, will that be, when the full consciousness breaks on us of what we will not believe now, that we *are* at present serving the world. We trifle with our conscience now; we deceive our better judgment; we repel the hints of those who tell us that we are joining ourselves to this perishing world. We *will* taste a little of its pleasures, and

follow its ways, and think it no harm, so that we do not altogether neglect religion. I mean, we allow ourselves to covet what we have not, to boast in what we have, to look down on those who have less; or we allow ourselves to profess what we do not try to practise, to argue for the sake of victory, and to debate when we should be obeying, and we pride ourselves on our reasoning powers, and think ourselves enlightened, and despise those who had less to say for themselves, and set forth and defend our own theories; or we are over-anxious, fretful, and careworn about worldly matters, spiteful, envious, jealous, discontented, and evil-natured: in one or other way we take our portion with this world, and we will not believe that we do. We obstinately refuse to believe it; we know we are not altogether irreligious, and we persuade ourselves that we are religious. We learn to think it is possible to be too religious; we have taught ourselves that there is nothing high or deep in religion, no great exercise of our affections, no great food for our thoughts, no great work for our exertions. We go on in a self-satisfied or a self-conceited way, not looking out of ourselves, not standing like soldiers on the watch, in the dark night; but we kindle our own fire, and delight ourselves in the sparks of it. This is our state, or something like this, and the Day will

declare it; the Day is at hand, and the Day will search our hearts, and bring it home even to ourselves, that we have been cheating ourselves with words, and have not served Christ, as the Redeemer of the soul claims, but with a meagre, partial, worldly service, and without really contemplating Him who is above and apart from this world.

Year passes after year silently; Christ's coming is even nearer than it was. O that, as He comes nearer earth, we may approach nearer heaven! O, my brethren, pray Him to give you the heart to seek Him in sincerity. Pray Him to make you in earnest. You have one work only, to bear your cross after Him. Resolve in His strength to do so. Resolve to be no longer beguiled by "shadows of religion," by words, or by disputings, or by notions, or by high professions, or by excuses, or by the world's promises or threats. Pray Him to give you what Scripture calls "an honest and good heart," or "a perfect heart," and, without waiting, begin at once to obey Him with the best heart you have. Any obedience is better than none,—any profession which is disjoined from obedience, is a mere pretence and deceit. Any religion which does not bring you nearer to God is of the world. You have to seek His face; obedience is the only way of seeing Him. All your duties are obediences. If you are to believe

the truths He has revealed, to regulate yourselves by His precepts, to be frequent in His ordinances, to adhere to His Church and people; why is it, except because *He* has bid you? and to do what He bids is to obey Him, and to obey Him is to approach Him. Every act of obedience is an approach,—an approach to Him who is not far off, though He seems so, but close behind this visible screen of things which hides Him from us. He is behind this material framework; earth and sky are but a veil going between Him and us; the day will come when He will rend that veil, and show Himself to us. And then, according as we have waited for Him, will He recompense us. If we have forgotten Him, He will not know us; but "blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching..... He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants[6]." May this be the portion of every one of us! It is hard to attain it; but it is woeful to fail. Life is short; death is certain; and the world to come is everlasting.

[6] Luke xii. 37, 38.

SERMON XXVI.

THE GREATNESS AND LITTLENESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

GEN. xlvii. 9.

"The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been; and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage."

WHY did the aged Patriarch call his days few, who had lived twice as long as men now live, when he spoke? why did he call them evil, seeing he had on the whole lived in riches and honour, and, what is more, in God's favour? yet he described his time as short, his days as evil, and his life as but a pilgrimage. Or if we allow that his afflictions were such as to make him reasonably think cheaply of his life, in spite of the blessings which attended it, yet that he should call it short, considering he had so much more time for the highest purposes of his being than we have, is at first sight surprising. He alludes indeed to the

longer life which had been granted to his fathers, and perhaps felt a decrepitude greater than theirs had been; yet this difference between him and them could hardly be the real ground of his complaint in the text, or more than a confirmation or occasion of it. It was not because Abraham had lived one hundred and seventy-five years, and Isaac one hundred and eighty, and he himself, whose life was not yet finished, but one hundred and thirty, that he made this mournful speech. For it matters not when time is gone what length it has been; and this doubtless was the real cause why the Patriarch spoke as he did, not because his life was shorter than his fathers', but because it was well nigh over. When life is past, it is all one whether it has lasted two hundred years or fifty. And it is this characteristic, stamped on human life in the day of its birth, viz. that it is mortal, which makes it under all circumstances and in every form equally feeble and despicable. All the points in which men differ, health and strength, high or low estate, happiness or misery, vanish before this common lot, mortality. Pass a few years, and the longest-lived will be gone; nor will what is past profit him then, except in its consequences.

And this sense of the nothingness of life, impressed on us by the very fact that it comes to an

end, is much deepened, when we contrast it with the capabilities of us who live it. Had Jacob lived Methuselah's age, he would have called it short. This is what we all feel, though at first sight it seems a contradiction, that even though the days as they go be slow, and be laden with many events, or with sorrows or dreariness, lengthening them out and making them tedious, yet the year passes quick though the hours tarry, and time bygone is as a dream, though we thought it would never go while it was going. And the reason seems to be this; that when we contemplate human life in itself, in however small a portion of it, we see implied in it the presence of a soul, the energy of a spiritual existence, of an accountable being; consciousness tells us this concerning it every moment. But when we look back on it in memory, we view it but externally, as a mere lapse of time, as a mere earthly history. And the longest duration of this external world is as dust and weighs nothing, against one moment's life of the world within. Thus we are ever expecting great things from life, from our internal consciousness every moment of our having souls; and we are ever being disappointed, on considering what we have gained from time past, and can hope from time to come. And life is ever promising and never fulfilling; and hence, however,

long it be, our days are few and evil. This is the particular view of the subject on which I shall now dwell.

Our earthly life then gives promise of what it does not accomplish. It promises immortality, yet it is mortal; it contains life in death and eternity in time; and it attracts us by beginnings which faith alone brings to an end. I mean, when we take into account the powers, with which our souls are gifted as Christians, the very consciousness of these fills us with a certainty that they must last beyond this life; that is, in the case of good and holy men, whose present state, I say, is to them who know them well, an earnest of immortality. The greatness of their gifts, contrasted with their scanty time for exercising them, forces the mind forward to the thought of another life, as almost the necessary counterpart and consequence of this life, and certainly implied in this life, provided there be a righteous Governor of the world, who does not make man for nought.

This is a thought which will come upon us, not always, but under circumstances. And many perhaps of those who at first hearing may think they never felt it, may recognize what I mean, while I describe it.

I mean, when one sees some excellent person, whose graces we know, whose kindliness, affec-

tionateness, tenderness, and generosity,—when we see him dying, (let him have lived ever so long; I am not supposing a premature death; let him live out his days,) the thought is forced upon us with a sort of surprise; "Surely, he is not to die yet; he has not yet had any opportunity of exercising duly those excellent gifts with which God has endowed him." Let him have lived seventy or eighty years, yet it seems as if he had done nothing at all, and his life were scarcely begun. He has lived all his days perhaps in a private sphere; he has been engaged on a number of petty matters which died with the day, and yielded no apparent fruit. He has had just enough of trial under various circumstances, to evidence, but not adequately to employ, what was in him. He has, we perhaps perceive, a noble benevolence of mind, a warmth of heart, and a beneficent temper, which, had it the means, would scatter blessings on every side; yet he has never been rich,—he dies poor. We have been accustomed to say to ourselves, "What would such a one be were he wealthy?" not as fancying he ever *will* have riches, but from feeling how he would become them; yet, when he actually does die as he lived, without them, we feel somehow disappointed,—there has been a failure,—his mind, we think, has never reached its scope,—he has had a treasure within him which has never

been used. His days have been but few and evil, and have become old unseasonably compared with his capabilities; and we are driven by a sense of these, to look on to a future state as a time when they will be brought out and come into effect. I am not attempting by such reflections to prove that there is a future state; let us take that for granted. I mean, over and above our positive belief in this great truth, we are actually driven to a belief, we attain a sort of sensible conviction of that life to come, a certainty striking home to our hearts and piercing them, by this imperfection in what is present. The very greatness of our powers makes this life look pitiful; the very pitifulness of this life forces on our thoughts to another; and the prospect of another gives a dignity and value to this life which promises it; and thus this life is at once great and little, and we rightly contemn it while we exalt its importance.

And, if this life is short, even when longest, from the great disproportion between it and the powers of regenerate man, still more is this the case, of course, where it is cut short, and death comes prematurely. Men there are, who, in a single moment of their lives, have shown a superhuman height and majesty of mind which it would take ages for them to employ on its proper objects, and, as it were, to exhaust; and who by such passing flashes,

like rays of the sun, and the darting of lightning, give token of their immortality, give token to us that they are but Angels in disguise, the elect of God sealed for eternal life, and destined to judge the world and to reign with Christ for ever. Yet they are suddenly taken away, and we have hardly recognized them when we lose them. Can we believe that they are not removed for higher things elsewhere? This is sometimes said with reference to our intellectual powers; but it is still more true of our moral nature. There is something in moral truth and goodness, in faith, in firmness, in heavenly-mindedness, in meekness, in courage, in loving-kindness, to which this world's circumstances are quite unequal, for which the longest life is insufficient, which makes the highest opportunities of this world disappointing, which must burst the prison of this world to have its appropriate range. So that when a good man dies, one is led to say, "He has not half showed himself, he has had nothing to exercise him; his days are gone like a shadow, and he is withered like grass."

I say the word "disappointing" is the only word to express our feelings on the death of God's saints. Unless our faith be very active, so as to pierce beyond the grave, and realize the future, we feel depressed at what seems like a failure of great things. And from this very feeling surely,

by a sort of contradiction, we may fairly take hope; for if this life be so disappointing, so unfinished, surely it is not the whole. This feeling of disappointment will often come upon us in an especial way, on happening to hear of or to witness the deathbeds of holy men. The hour of death seems to be a season, of which, in the hands of Providence, much might be *made*, if I may use the term; much might be done for the glory of God, the good of man, and the manifestation of the person dying. And beforehand friends will perhaps look forward, and expect that great things are then to take place, which they shall never forget. Yet, "how dieth the wise man? as the fool[1]." Such is the preacher's experience, and our own bears witness to it. King Josiah, the zealous servant of the Living God, died the death of wicked Ahab, the worshipper of Baal. True Christians die as other men. One dies by a sudden accident, another in battle, another without friends to see how he dies, a fourth is insensible or not himself. Thus the opportunity seems thrown away, and we are forcibly reminded that "the manifestation of the sons of God[2]" is hereafter; that "the earnest expectation of the creature" is but waiting for it; that this life is unequal to the burden of so great

[1] Eccles. ii. 16. [2] Rom. viii. 19.

an office as the due exhibition of those secret ones who shall one day "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father[3]."

But further, (if it be allowable to speculate,) one can conceive even the same kind of feeling, and a most transporting one, to come over the soul of the faithful Christian, when just separated from the body, and conscious that his trial is once for all over. Though his life has been a long and painful discipline, yet when it is over, we may suppose him to feel at the moment the same sort of surprise at its being ended, as generally follows any exertion in this life, when the object is gained and the anticipation over. When we have wound up our minds for any point of time, any great event, an interview with strangers, or the sight of some wonder, or the occasion of some unusual trial, when it comes, and is gone, we have a strange reverse of feeling from our changed circumstances. Such, but without any mixture of pain, without any lassitude, dulness, or disappointment, may be the happy contemplation of the disembodied spirit; as if it said to itself, "So all is now over; this is what I have so long waited for; for which I have nerved myself; against which I have prepared, fasted, prayed, and wrought

[3] Matt. xiii. 43.

righteousness. Death is come and gone,—it is over. Ah! is it possible? What an easy trial, what a cheap price for eternal glory! A few sharp sicknesses, or some acute pain awhile, or some few and evil years, or some struggles of mind, dreary desolateness for a season, fightings and fears, afflicting bereavements or the scorn and ill-usage of the world,—how they fretted me, how much I thought of them, yet how little really they are! How contemptible a thing is human life,—contemptible in itself, yet in its effects invaluable! for it has been to me like a small seed of easy purchase, germinating and ripening into bliss everlasting."

Such being the unprofitableness of this life, viewed in itself, it is plain how we should regard it while we go through it. We should remember that it is scarcely more than an accident of our being,—that it is no part of ourselves, who are immortal; that we are immortal spirits, independent of time and space, and that this life is but a sort of outward stage, on which we act for a time, and which is only sufficient and only intended to answer the purpose of trying whether we will serve God or no. We should consider ourselves to be in this world in no fuller sense than players in any game are in the game; and life to be a sort of dream, as detached and as different from our

real eternal existence, as a dream differs from waking; a serious dream, indeed, as affording a means of judging us, yet in itself a kind of shadow without substance, a scene set before us, in which we seem to be, and in which it is our duty to act, just as if all we saw had a truth and reality, because all that meets us influences us and our destiny. The regenerate soul is taken into communion with Saints and Angels, and its "life is hid with Christ in God[4];" it has a place in God's court, and is not of this world,—looking into this world as a spectator might look at some show or pageant, except when called from time to time to take a part. And while it obeys the instinct of the senses, it does so for God's sake, and it submits itself to things of time so far as to be brought to perfection by them, that when the veil is withdrawn and it sees itself to be, where it ever has been, in God's kingdom, it may be found worthy to enjoy it. It is this view of life, which removes from us all surprise and disappointment that it is so incomplete: as well might we expect any chance event which happens in the course of it to be complete, any casual conversation with a stranger, or the toil or amusement of an hour.

Let us then thus account of our present state:

[4] Col. iii. 3.

it is precious as revealing to us, amid shadows and figures, the existence and attributes of Almighty God and His elect people: it is precious, because it enables us to hold intercourse with immortal souls who are on their trial, as we are. It is momentous, as being the scene and means of our trial; but beyond this it has no claims upon us. "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity." We may be poor or rich, young or old, honoured or slighted, and it ought to affect us no more, neither to elate us nor depress us, than if we were actors in a play, who know that the characters they represent are not their own, and that though they may appear to be superior one to another, to be kings or to be peasants, they are in reality all on a level. The one desire which should move us should be, first of all, that of seeing Him face to face, who is now hid from us; and, next, of enjoying eternal and direct communion, in and through Him, with our friends around us, whom at present we know only through the medium of sense, by precarious and partial channels, which give us little insight into their hearts.

These are suitable feelings towards this attractive but deceitful world. What have we to do with its gifts and honours, who have been already baptized into the world to come, and are no longer citizens of this? Why should we be anxious for

a long life, or wealth, or credit, or comfort, who know that the next world will be every thing which our hearts can wish, and that not in appearance only, but truly and everlastingly? Why should we rest in this world, when it is the token and promise of another? Why should we be content with its surface, instead of appropriating what is stored beneath it? To those who live by faith, every thing they see speaks of that future world; the very glories of nature, the sun, moon, and stars, and the richness and the beauty of the earth are as types and figures witnessing and teaching the invisible things of God. All that we see is destined one day to burst forth into a heavenly bloom, and to be transfigured into immortal glory. Heaven at present is out of sight, but in due time, as snow melts and discovers what it lay upon, so will this visible creation fade away before those greater splendours which are behind it, and on which at present it depends. In that day shadows will retire, and the substance show itself. The sun will grow pale and be lost in the sky, but it will be before the radiance of Him whom it does but image, the Sun of Righteousness, with healing on His wings, who will come forth in visible form, as a bridegroom out of his chamber, while His perishable type decays. The stars which surround it will be replaced by Saints and Angels

circling His throne. Above and below, the clouds of the air, the trees of the field, the waters of the great deep will be found impregnated with the forms of everlasting spirits, the servants of God which do His pleasure. And our own mortal bodies will then be found in like manner to contain within them an inner man, which will then receive its due proportions, as the soul's harmonious organ, instead of that gross mass of flesh and blood which sight and touch are sensible of. For this glorious manifestation the whole creation is at present in travail, earnestly desiring that it may be accomplished in its season.

These are thoughts to make us eagerly and devoutly say, "Come, Lord Jesus, to end the time of waiting, of darkness, of turbulence, of disputing, of sorrow, of care." These are thoughts to lead us to rejoice in every day and hour that passes, as bringing us nearer the time of His appearing, and the termination of sin and misery. They are thoughts which ought thus to affect us; and so they would, were it not for the load of guilt which weighs upon us, for sins committed against light and grace. O that it were otherwise with us! O that we were fitted duly to receive this lesson which the world gives us, and had so improved the gifts of life, that while we felt it to be perishing, we might rejoice in it as precious!

O that we were not conscious of deep stains upon our souls, the accumulations of past years, and of infirmities continually besetting us! Were it not for all this,—were it not for our unprepared state, as in one sense it may truly be called, how gladly should we hail each new month and year as a token that our Saviour is so much nearer to us than He ever has been yet! May He grant His grace abundantly to us, to make us meet for His presence, that we may not be ashamed before Him at His coming! May He vouchsafe to us the full grace of His ordinances: may He feed us with His choicest gifts: may He expel the poison from our souls: may He wash us clean in His precious blood, and give us the fulness of faith, love, and hope, as foretastes of the heavenly portion which He destines for us!

SERMON XXVII.

THE INVISIBLE WORLD.

2 Cor. iv. 18.

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

There are two worlds, "the visible, and the invisible," as the Creed speaks,—the world we see, and the world we do not see; and the world we do not see as really exists as the world we do see. It really exists, though we see it not. The world we see we know to exist, *because* we see it. We have but to lift up our eyes and look around us, and we have proof of it: our eyes tell us. We see the sun, moon and stars, earth and sky, hills and valleys, woods and plains, seas and rivers. And again, we see men, and the works of men. We see cities, and stately buildings, and their inhabitants; men running to and fro, and busying themselves to provide for themselves and their families,

or to accomplish great designs, or for the very business' sake. All that meets our eyes forms one world. It is an immense world; it reaches to the stars. Thousands on thousands of years might we speed up the sky, and though we were swifter than the light itself, we should not reach them all. They are at distances from us greater than any that is assignable. So high, so wide, so deep is the world; and yet it also comes near and close to us. It is every where; and it seems to leave no room for any other world.

And yet in spite of this universal world which we see, there is another world, quite as far-spreading, quite as close to us, and more wonderful; another world all around us, though we see it not, and more wonderful than the world we see, for this reason if for no other, that we do not see it. All around us are numberless objects, coming and going, watching, working or waiting, which we see not: this is that other world, which the eyes reach not unto, but faith only.

Let us dwell upon this thought. We are born into a world of sense; that is, of the real things which lie round about us, one great department comes to us, accosts us, through our bodily organs, our eyes, ears, and fingers. We feel, hear, and see them; and we know they exist, because we do thus perceive them. Things in-

numerable lie about us, animate and inanimate; but one particular class of these innumerable things is thus brought home to us through our senses. And moreover, while they act upon us, they make their presence known. We are sensible of them, at the time, or are conscious that we perceive them. We not only see, but know that we see them; we not only hold intercourse, but know that we do. We are among men, and we know that we are. We feel cold and hunger; we know what sensible things remove them. We eat, drink, clothe ourselves, dwell in houses, converse and act with others, and perform the duties of social life; and we feel vividly that we are doing so, while we do so. Such is our relation towards one part of the innumerable beings which lie around us. They act upon us, and we know it; and we act upon them in turn, and know we do.

But all this does not interfere with the existence of that other world which I speak of, acting upon us, yet not impressing us with the consciousness that it does so. It may as really be present and exert an influence as that which reveals itself to us. And that such a world there is, Scripture tells us. Do you ask what it is, and what it contains? I will not say that all that belongs to it is vastly more important than what we see, for among things visible are our fellow-

men, and nothing created is more precious and noble than a son of man. But still, taking the things which we see altogether, and the things we do not see altogether, the world we do not see is on the whole a much higher world than that which we do see. For, first of all, He is there who is above all beings, who has created all, before whom they all are as nothing, and with whom nothing can be compared. Almighty God, we know, exists more really and absolutely than any of those fellow-men whose existence is conveyed to us through the senses; yet we see Him not, hear Him not, we do but "feel after Him," yet without finding Him. It appears, then, that the things which are seen are but a part, and but a secondary part of the beings about us, were it only on this ground, that Almighty God, the Being of beings, is not in their number, but among "the things which are not seen." Once, and once only, for thirty-three years, has He condescended to become one of the beings which are seen, when the second Person of the Ever-blessed Trinity was, by an unspeakable mercy, born of the Virgin Mary into this sensible world. And then He was seen, heard, handled; He ate, He drank, He slept, He conversed, He went about, He acted as other men; but excepting this brief period, His presence has never been perceptible; He has never

made us conscious of His existence by means of our senses. He came, and He retired beyond the veil: and to us individually, it is as if He had never showed Himself; we have as little sensible experience of His presence. Yet "He liveth evermore."

And in that other world are the souls also of the dead. They too, when they depart hence, do not cease to exist, but they retire from this visible scene of things; or, in other words, they cease to act towards us and before us *through our senses.* They live as they lived before; but that outward frame, through which they were able to hold communion with other men, is in some way, we know not how, separated from them, and dries away and shrivels up as leaves may drop off a tree. They remain, but without the usual means of approach towards us, and correspondence with us. As when a man loses his voice or hand, he still exists as before, but cannot any longer talk or write, or otherwise hold intercourse with us; so when he loses not voice and hand only, but his whole frame, or is said to die, there is nothing to show that he is gone, but we have lost our means of apprehending him.

Again: Angels also are inhabitants of the world invisible, and concerning them much more is told us than concerning the souls of the faithful

departed, because the latter "rest from their labours;" but the Angels are actively employed among us in the Church. They are said to be "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation[1]." No Christian is so humble but he has Angels to attend on him, if he lives by faith and love. Though they are so great, so glorious, so pure, so wonderful, that the very sight of them (if we were allowed to see them) would strike us to the earth, as it did the prophet Daniel, holy and righteous as he was; yet they are our "fellow-servants" and our fellow-workers, and they carefully watch over and defend even the humblest of us, if we be Christ's. That they form a part of our unseen world, appears from the vision seen by the patriarch Jacob. We are told, that when he fled from his brother Esau, "he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun had set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep[2]." How little did he think that there was any thing very wonderful in this spot! It looked like any other spot. It was a lone, uncomfortable place: there was no house there: night was coming on; and he had to sleep

[1] Heb. i. 14.

[2] Gen. xxviii. 11.

upon the bare rock. Yet how different was the truth! He saw but the world that is seen; he saw not the world that is not seen; yet the world that is not seen was there. It was there, though it did not at once make known its presence, but needed to be supernaturally displayed to him. He saw it in his sleep. "He dreamed, and behold, a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached up to heaven; and behold, the Angels of God ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it." This was the other world. Now let this be observed. Persons commonly speak as if the other world did not exist now, but would after death. No: it exists now, though we see it not. It is among us and around us. Jacob was shown this in his dream. Angels were all about him, though he knew it not. And what Jacob saw in his sleep, that Elisha's servant saw as if with his eyes; and the shepherds, at the time of the Nativity, not only saw, but heard. They heard the voices of those blessed spirits who praise God day and night, and whom we, in our lower state of being, are allowed to copy and assist.

We are then in a world of spirits, as well as in a world of sense, and we hold communion with it, and take part in it, though we are not conscious of doing so. If this seems strange to any one, let

him reflect that we are undeniably taking part in a third world, which we do indeed see, but about which we do not know more than about the Angelic hosts,—the world of brute animals. Can any thing be more marvellous or startling, unless we were used to it, than that we should have a race of beings about us whom we do but see, and as little know their state, or can describe their interests, or their destiny, as we can tell of the inhabitants of the sun and moon? It is indeed a very overpowering thought, when we get to fix our minds on it, that we familiarly use, I may say hold intercourse with creatures who are as much strangers to us, as mysterious, as if they were the fabulous, unearthly beings, more powerful than man, yet his slaves, which Eastern superstitions have invented. We have more real knowledge about the Angels than about the brutes. They have apparently passions, habits, and a certain accountableness, but all is mystery about them. We do not know whether they can sin or not, whether they are under punishment, whether they are to live after this life. We inflict very great sufferings on a portion of them, and they in turn, every now and then, seem to retaliate upon us, as if by a wonderful law. We depend on them in various important ways; we use their labour, we eat their flesh. This however relates to such of

them as come near us; cast your thoughts abroad on the whole number of them, large and small, in vast forests, or in the water, or in the air; and then say whether the presence of such countless multitudes, so various in their natures, so strange and wild in their shapes, living on the earth without ascertainable object, is not as mysterious as any thing which Scripture says about the Angels? Is it not plain to our senses that there is a world inferior to us in the scale of beings, with which we are connected without understanding what it is? and is it difficult to faith to admit the word of Scripture concerning our connexion with a world superior to us?

When, indeed, persons feel it so difficult to conceive the existence among us of the world of spirits, because they are not aware of it, they should recollect how many worlds all at once are in fact contained in human society itself. We speak of the political world, the scientific, the learned, the literary, the religious world; and suitably; for men are so closely united with some men, and so divided from others, they have such distinct objects of pursuit one from another, and such distinct principles and engagements in consequence, that in one and the same place there exist together a number of circles or (as they may be called) worlds, made up of visible men, but

themselves invisible, unknown, nay, unintelligible to each other. Men move about in the common paths of life, and look the same; but there is little community of feeling between them; each knows little about what goes on in any other sphere than his own; and a stranger coming into any neighbourhood would, according to his own pursuits or acquaintances, go away with an utterly distinct, or a reverse impression of it, viewed as a whole. Or again, leave for awhile the political and commercial excitement of some large city, and take refuge in a secluded village; and there, in the absence of news of the day, consider the mode of life and habits of mind, the employments and views of its inhabitants; and say whether the world, when regarded in its separate portions, is not more unlike itself than it is unlike the world of Angels which Scripture places in the midst of it?

The world of spirits then, though unseen, is present; present, not future, not distant. It is not above the sky, it is not beyond the grave; it is now and here; the kingdom of God is among us. Of this the text speaks;—"We look," says St. Paul, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." You see he regarded

it as a practical truth, which was to influence our conduct. Not only does he speak of things invisible, but of the duty of "looking at" them; not only does he contrast the things of time with them, but says that their belonging to time is a reason, not for looking at, but for looking off them.

Eternity was not distant because it reached to the future; nor the unseen state without its influence on us because it was impalpable. In like manner, he says in another Epistle, "Our conversation is in heaven." And again, "God hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." And again, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." And to the same purport are St. Peter's words. "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And again, St. Paul, speaking of the Apostles, "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to Angels, and to men." And again in words already quoted, he speaks of the Angels as "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation[3]."

Such is the hidden kingdom of God; and, as it

[3] Phil. iii. 20. Eph. ii. 6. Col. iii. 3. 1 Pet. i. 8. 1 Cor. iv. 9. Heb. i. 14.

is now hidden, so in due season it shall be revealed. Men think that they are lords of the world, and may do as they will. They think this earth their property, and its movements in their power, whereas it has other lords besides them, and is the scene of a higher conflict than they are capable of conceiving. It contains Christ's little ones whom they despise, and His Angels whom they disbelieve; and these at length shall take possession of it and be manifested. At present, "all things," to appearance, "continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;" and scoffers ask, "Where is the promise of His coming?" but at the appointed time there will be a "manifestation of the sons of God," and the hidden saints "shall shine out as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." When the Angels appeared to the shepherds, it was a sudden appearance,—"*Suddenly* there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host." How wonderful a sight! The night had before that seemed just like any other night; as the evening on which Jacob saw the vision seemed like any other evening. They were keeping watch over their sheep; they were watching the night as it passed. The stars moved on,—it was midnight. They had no idea of such a thing when the Angel appeared. Such are the power and virtue hidden in things

which are seen, and at God's will they are manifested. They were manifested for a moment to Jacob, for a moment to Elisha's servant, for a moment to the shepherds. They will be manifested for ever when Christ comes at the Last Day "in the glory of His Father with the holy Angels." Then this world will fade away, and the other world will shine forth.

Let these be your thoughts, my brethren, especially in the spring season, when the whole face of nature is so rich and beautiful. Once only in the year, yet once, does the world which we see show forth its hidden powers, and in a manner manifest itself. Then the leaves come out, and the blossoms on the fruit trees, and flowers; and the grass and corn spring up. There is a sudden rush and burst outwardly of that hidden life which God has lodged in the material world. Well, that shows you, as by a sample, what it can do at God's command, when He gives the word. This earth, which now buds forth in leaves and blossoms, will one day burst forth into a new world of light and glory, in which we shall see Saints and Angels dwelling. Who would think, except from his experience of former springs all through his life, who could conceive two or three months before, that it was possible that the face of nature which then seemed so

lifeless, should become so splendid and varied? How different is a tree, how different is a prospect, when leaves are on it and off it. How unlikely it would seem, before the event, that the dry and naked branches should suddenly be clothed with what is so bright and so refreshing! Yet in God's good time leaves come on the trees. The season may delay, but come it will at last. So it is with the coming of that Eternal Spring, for which all Christians are waiting. Come it will, though it delay; yet though it tarry, let us wait for it, "because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Therefore we say day by day, "Thy kingdom come;" which means,—O Lord, show Thyself; manifest Thyself; Thou that sittest between the cherubim, show Thyself; stir up Thy strength, and come and help us. The earth that we see does not satisfy us; it is but a beginning; it is but a promise of something beyond it; even when it is gayest, with all its blossoms on, and shows most touchingly what lies hid in it, yet it is not enough. We know much more lies hid in it than we see. A world of Saints and Angels, a glorious world, the palace of God, the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the heavenly Jerusalem, the throne of God and Christ, all these wonders, everlasting, all-precious, mysterious, and incomprehensible, lie hid in what we see. What we see is the outward

shell of an eternal kingdom; and on that kingdom we fix the eyes of our faith. Shine forth, O Lord, as when on Thy nativity Thine Angels visited the shepherds; let Thy glory blossom forth as bloom and foliage on the trees; change with Thy mighty power this visible world into that diviner world, which as yet we see not; destroy what we see, that it may pass and be transformed into what we believe. Bright as is the sun, and the sky, and the clouds; green as are the leaves and the fields; sweet as is the singing of the birds; we know that they are not all, and we will not take up with a part for the whole. They proceed from a centre of love and goodness, which is God Himself; but they are not His fulness; they speak of heaven, but they are not heaven; they are but as stray beams and dim reflections of His Image; they are but crumbs from the table. We are looking for the coming of the day of God, when all this outward world, fair though it be, shall perish; when the heavens shall be burnt, and the earth melt away. We can bear the loss, for we know it will be but the removing of a veil. We know that to remove the world which is seen, will be the manifestation of the world which is not seen. We know that what we see is as a screen hiding from us God and Christ, and His Saints and Angels. And we earnestly desire and pray for the dissolu-

tion of all that we see, from our longing after that which we do not see.

O blessed they indeed, who are destined for the sight of those wonders in which they now stand, at which they now look, but which they do not recognize! Blessed they who shall at length behold what as yet mortal eye hath not seen, and faith only enjoys! Those wonderful things of the new world are even now as they shall be then. They are immortal and eternal; and the souls who shall then be made conscious of them, will see them in their calmness and their majesty where they ever have been. But who can express the surprise and rapture which will come upon those, who then at least apprehend them for the first time, and to whose perceptions they are new! Who can imagine by a stretch of fancy the feelings of those who, having died in faith, wake up to enjoyment! The life then begun, we know, will last for ever; yet surely if memory be to us then what it is now, that will be a day much to be observed unto the Lord through all the ages of eternity. We may increase indeed for ever in knowledge and in love, still that first waking from the dead, the day at once of our birth and our espousals, will ever be endeared and hallowed in our thoughts. When we find ourselves after long rest gifted with fresh powers, vigorous with the seed of eternal life

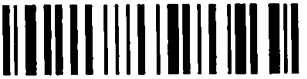
within us, able to love God as we wish, conscious that all trouble, sorrow, pain, anxiety, bereavement, is over for ever, blessed in the full affection of those earthly friends whom we loved so poorly, and could protect so feebly, while they were with us in the flesh, and above all, visited by the immediate visible ineffable Presence of God Almighty, with His Only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and His Co-equal Co-eternal Spirit, that great sight in which is the fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore,—what deep, incommunicable, unimaginable thoughts will be then upon us! what depths will be stirred up within us! what secret harmonies awakened, of which human nature seemed incapable! Earthly words are indeed all worthless to minister to such high anticipations. Let us close our eyes and keep silence.

"All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of our God shall stand for ever[4]."

[4] Isai. xl. 6—8.

THE END.

GILBERT & RIVINGTON, Printers, St. John's Square, London.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on 10 March, 2016